

MARIEKEN DE BRUIN

SOMEWHERE IN BELGIUM

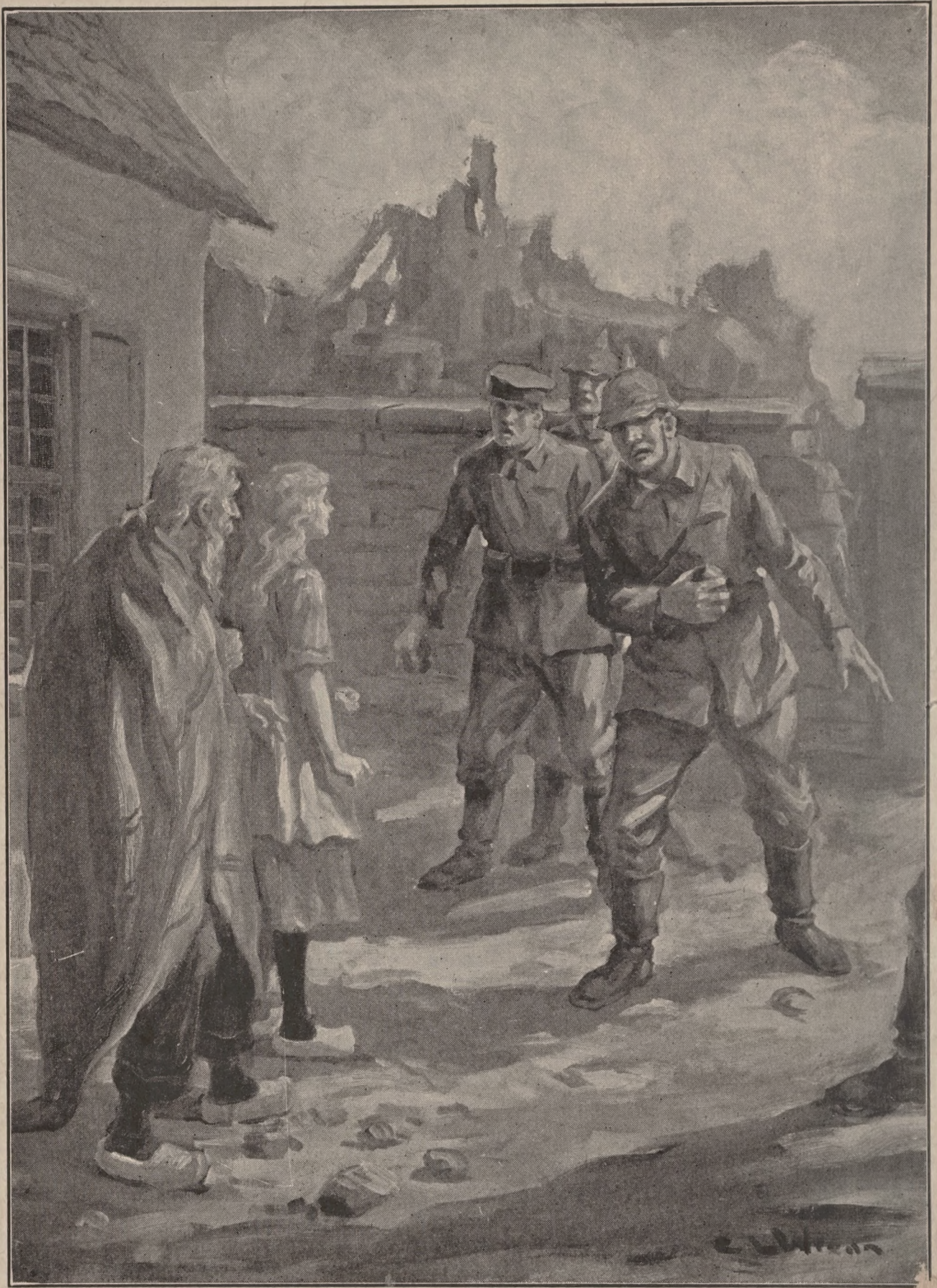


MARTHA TRENT





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“ ‘Fritz, Hans, and you, Hendrick, shame on you to hit an old man’ ”

(Page 50) *Frontispiece*

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BY

MARTHA TRENT

ILLUSTRATED BY

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MARIEKEN DE BRUIN

SOMEWHERE IN BELGIUM

CHAPTER I

THE VEGETABLE OMELET

“PLEASE, Herr Captain, take your muddy boots off my floor. I’ve just scrubbed it.”

Marieken De Bruin uttered the above, not as a polite request but as a command.

With her hands on her hips, her small well-shaped, blonde head held high, and her dark eyes flashing, she stood in the doorway of the Inn kitchen and frowned indignantly at the big German officer.

Captain Ludwig Hein, of the Imperial German Uhlans, stopped on his way to the stove and laughed with lazy tolerance.

“If my muddy boots dirty the floor you can scrub it again, little spitfire,” he replied. “You

forget that this is a German kitchen and that you serve Germans.”

Marieken smiled and shrugged one thin little shoulder, but she did not openly contradict; instead she said with significance,

“I have a bad memory for some things, Herr Captain. Only fancy, just now for the life of me I can’t remember how to make a vegetable omelet, the kind you and the Herr General are so fond of—but—it doesn’t matter, if I must scrub the floor again I will have no time to make one for supper anyway, so—” Another expressive little shrug finished the sentence, and she left the room humming softly.

Captain Hein growled indignantly, but he was a prudent as well as a hungry man. Marieken had given him his choice and he wisely chose the omelet, although it annoyed him to forego the satisfaction of tracking mud on the spotless kitchen floor.

One year before this story opens, the village of Zandre had been a happy, thriving hamlet.

The simple people had been contented with their little round of life and work. A worthy Burgomaster had governed them wisely, and a kind old Curé had stood by to help them in times of need with his ready understanding.

The sun had smiled on their fields, and their labor had always been rewarded by plenteous crops.

On the whole, the citizens had a right to be proud of the wealth, peace and prosperity of their village.

Not the least important in the community in those quiet times was Monsieur De Bruin, the proprietor of the Village Inn, a bluff and hearty man whose fame as an innkeeper had spread throughout the countryside. Madame, his wife, was a frail, little woman from the city; she was responsible for the modern improvements that added so much to the comfort of their hostelry.

There was a handsome son, Henri, a soldier in the Belgian Army, and Marieken, the fourteen-year-old daughter. She was a great favorite with her father and had grown up with more independ-

ence of thought and action than is usually permitted to the average village girl. She had been away to school and spoke German and French, as well as her native Flemish.

Besides the immediate family there were cousins: Jeanneken, a beautiful girl of seventeen; Josef, a boy of ten; and Albert, a roly-poly baby of two. They were the children of Monsieur De Bruin's brother, and when their parents died their aunt and uncle had received them, not only into their comfortable home, but into their big hearts as well. There, they had all lived in peaceful contentment as one big family. Then had come the dark days of the great war.

Zandre, after a gallant resistance, fell to the Germans. Monsieur De Bruin was killed, one of the first heroes of that brave little army.

Henri joined his regiment at the first call and was soon lost to his native village.

The sudden shock of her husband's death, followed by the horrors of the bombardment, left Madame De Bruin prostrate.

Jeanneken, with her little brothers, was finally

prevailed upon to join in the long file of fleeing refugees, but her little cousin and her aunt stayed behind to face the invaders. When the Germans marched triumphantly down the one main street of the village, they found it deserted, except for a few old peasants, the Burgomaster, the Curé and Marieken.

They made an odd receiving committee, these three, as they stood in the market place: the two old men with their stooped shoulders and care-worn faces, and Marieken in her black apron, her cheeks glowing and her eyes afire.

When the pompous and imposing General Von Dulk had ordered the Burgomaster to be locked up in his own prison and had sent the gentle Curé off to collect the few frightened villagers who had shut themselves up in their houses, he turned to Marieken.

Now, it is not the thing for German officers to be taken by surprise, but when a very thin, very erect, little girl, not in the least abashed by the imposing display of uniforms, addressed him in his own language, the General admitted his

astonishment. Marieken explained quite clearly why she had remained.

“My mother is very ill, Herr General,” she had said. “My father is dead; I am in charge of the Inn, but if you don’t let your men trample up my garden, or kill my chickens and cows, I can get you up a very respectable supper, also I will see that you have comfortable beds to sleep in and plenty of hot water. I am a *very* good cook,” she added quite simply.

The General was completely dumfounded. He turned over several sharp replies in his mind. He knew that he ought to order her not to speak until she was spoken to, or to tell her that she was his prisoner and would do what he commanded. But he did neither; he made the great mistake of accepting her proposal.

True to her promise, Marieken prepared a dinner, such as the nine officers on the General’s staff had not dared to dream of since the beginning of the war.

After the meal the Herr General deigned to be pleased, and in a lordly fashion he promised her

his protection. Perhaps he had an unGerman respect for her daring courage, or perhaps the fact that she spoke his language excellently (his own French was very bad) softened his heart. But Marieken accredited her success entirely to the vegetable omelet.

On so slight a thing will the fate of an empire sometimes rest.

Six months passed and Zandre grew accustomed to being a German headquarters. A few of the villagers returned after months of hardships and suffering. They found their homes wrecked, but their new governors permitted them to build new ones and fed them grudgingly with grain that they themselves had helped to cultivate.

Stunned and heartbroken, they took up the threads of their village life and the days dragged wearily on.

When Marieken left the kitchen, after her veiled threat to the Captain, she climbed up the ladder that led to the tiny separate attic at one end of the Inn.

“Ah, Mama,” she called cheerfully, when her

head appeared above the opening, "are you all right?"

Madame De Bruin, pale and wan, turned on the straw mattress that served as a bed and smiled and nodded, but there was no sign of recognition in her eyes. After a minute her glance wandered back to the window again.

Marieken shook her head sadly, tidied the bed clothes a little and went back downstairs. She tiptoed into the kitchen; it was empty. She noticed that there were no muddy footprints beyond the spot where the Captain had stopped.

She set about the preparations for an omelet, with a satisfied smile lurking at the corners of her mouth.

CHAPTER II

DINNER AT SIX

THE heavy thud of boots and the jangle of spurs, as two heels clicked together, made Marieken pause in the act of stirring the contents of a big pot over the stove and look up. A delicious aroma of stewing vegetables filled the room.

“Well, what is it, Fritz?” she inquired, as she recognized the General’s orderly standing at attention in the doorway.

Fritz saluted gravely. He had been in the General’s service for years, and when on duty had acquired some of his master’s pompous dignity.

“The General’s orders, Fräulein,” he answered. “Dinner at six instead of seven.”

“Why, it’s five o’clock now,” Marieken protested. “What do they want it so early for?”

Fritz’s eyes opened wide in astonishment.

“Fräulein, one does not ask questions when a general commands; one obeys,” he replied in rebuke.

Marieken stamped her foot impatiently.

“Oh, bother the General’s commands; go away, and I’ll ask him myself,” she scolded. “Such a lot of silly mystery over nothing.”

“Well, what are you waiting for?” she inquired, as Fritz, his message delivered, relaxed a little and stood grinning sheepishly in the doorway. “If you are looking for cookies you might just as well save your time. I have none for you if you won’t tell me where the General goes to-night.”

Fritz shifted his position.

“It’s been a nice day, Fräulein,” he ventured.

Marieken did not even acknowledge his remark by as much as a nod. She stirred her stew for a few minutes and then pushed the pot to the back of the stove and crossed the kitchen to open a big door that led into an airy pantry.

Out of an earthen crock she took two dozen cookies, nicely browned on top, put them on a big

blue-and-white plate and left them on the table in the center of the room.

Fritz eyed them hungrily and attempted blandishments.

“What a wonderful cook you are, Fräulein Marieken,” he said. “As good almost as a German girl. Even the Herr General deigns to say so.”

Marieken laughed.

“Do you think you can get a cooky out of me by such words, friend Fritz?” she inquired. “‘Almost as good as a German girl,’ indeed. I’m a thousand times better, and you know it. When did a German girl ever make chocolate that wasn’t all bumps, or an amelet that wasn’t like shoe leather? Don’t you think I know? There were plenty of fat German girls at the convent with me.”

She returned to the stove with a toss of her head and turned her small back on the nonplussed Fritz.

He watched her in silence, and then tiptoed to the table. He was almost in reach of the desired cookies when Marieken whirled around in a fury.

“Dare to touch one of those and I will tell the General,” she threatened.

Fritz growled and retreated to the doorway again, and Marieken went on with her preparations.

A few minutes before six a clatter of horses’ hoofs in the courtyard announced the return of the General.

Marieken hurried toward the green baize door that led into the parlor, that served as an officers’ dining-room, with a tray of glasses. She stopped at the table to take the plate of cookies with her. Fritz knew that once that plate disappeared through that green door none of the cookies would ever find their way back to the kitchen.

“The General goes to Voorle to-night to consult with General Markert,” he admitted gruffly.

Marieken rested the tray on the back of a chair; the corners of her mouth twitched.

“Why, Fritz, are you still here?” she asked. “I thought you had gone. Here, have a cooky,

won't you?" She chose two of the largest on the plate and tossed them to him, then she picked up the tray and hurried through the door.

"Good evening, Herr General," she said as the officers took their places at the table.

"Ah, good evening, my little Fräulein, and how much do you love your German guests to-night?" General Von Dulk was possessed of a clumsy wit. He had asked this one question the first night at the Inn, and his officers had laughed loudly in appreciation, so he had repeated it every night since then.

And every night Marieken had replied with a pretended seriousness, "That is my secret, Herr General, but I will tell you to-morrow surely." To-night, however, she said instead,

"How much does any innkeeper love his guests when they come in an hour too soon for dinner? What kind of a meal can you expect?"

"But I sent word to you by Fritz," the General protested.

"At five o'clock," Marieken interrupted. "That left no time at all." She shrugged her

shoulders. "Well, all I can say is, don't grumble when you taste what I have prepared."

When she had hurried out of the room Captain Hein brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"That child!" he exclaimed. "She is so impudent that my fingers itch to box her ears."

"Well, let them itch," Lieutenant Strenger replied. "If you had seen General Markert's quarters to-day and eaten what he was pleased to call lunch, you would appreciate our luck. When the war is over, I intend taking Marieken back to Berlin with me as cook."

"I beg your pardon," the General blustered, "but mine, I think, is the prior right."

"Well, I would teach her manners first," Captain Hein grumbled. "To-day I walked into her kitchen, and because my boots were muddy she turned on me like a little fury and commanded me not to take another step. I reprimanded her severely, I can tell you."

"But did you take another step?" Lieutenant Strenger inquired.

“No, I, er—well, as it happens I didn’t—you see, I had left my cigarettes—”

The General led in the laugh that followed.

Marieken came in before they had stopped, carrying a big soup tureen. She put it down before the General and smiled roguishly as she uncovered it.

“Only onion soup, Herr General, but I had so little time,” she apologized demurely.

“You little vixen, so this is your cold supper, is it?” The General pretended a great wrath. “We shall see what happens to little girls who try to deceive their elders.”

“Better wait a little while,” Marieken suggested, as she went back to the kitchen to bring in the next course. It was the famous omelet, followed by beef supplied by the German Government, but Marieken had disguised it under a thick vegetable gravy.

The General was delighted. He ate greedily and very fast. When he finished, he pulled Marieken down to the arm of his chair, patted her

cheek, drank her health in the wine that was left in his glass, and gave her a patronizing kiss.

Marieken escaped to the kitchen as soon as he would let her and washed her face angrily at the kitchen pump.

She did not return to the dining-room until the clatter of the horses and the confusion of leaving told her that they had started for Voorle.

Then she went out around the back of the house.

“Oh, Fritz,” she called.

Several voices from the barn answered her.

“Who wants to earn some cookies?” she asked.

“There aren’t any left,” Fritz’s voice replied from somewhere in the straw of one of the stalls.

“Oh, yes there are; there’s a whole crock full. I hid them. If you’ll wash up I’ll give them to you.”

Three figures jumped to their feet with alacrity.

They were officers’ orderlies, quartered in the barn. They were supposed to stand behind their masters’ chairs at meals, but Marieken had found them a great nuisance and the General had been

only too glad to send them out of the room, with orders that they were to help the Fräulein when she wanted them.

Marieken had never imposed on the order. She was careful to repay their services with cakes or tarts; in return the men looked upon her with grudging admiration.

Fritz and Hans volunteered to-night.

“Mind you don’t break anything,” Marieken directed, as they lumbered off toward the house.

“Why, Hendrick, what’s the matter with you?” she demanded, as she nearly stumbled over a prostrate figure on the floor.

A fair-haired, young German boy sat up and looked at her out of two heavy-lidded blue eyes.

“The Herr Doctor, he says nothing, but I say I am sick,” he answered crossly. “See this cut on my arm.”

Marieken inspected the ugly red wound.

“Did you show this to the doctor?”

“Yes, and he told me not to bother him unless I had something really wrong with me. Now, Fräulein, what do you call that?”

Marieken considered a minute.

“I call it a bad cut, Hendrick; you come with me and I’ll fix it for you.”

She led him to the pump in the middle of the stable yard, then she went into the house and came back with some soft linen torn into strips.

“Now, don’t be a great baby,” she admonished, as Hendrick shrank from the sting of the cold water. “You ought not to have let this get so dirty. Now stop, I must get it clean; there this will hurt but only a little, so now the bandage.”

She bound up the arm neatly and tied the ends of the bandage.

Hendrick watched her suspiciously.

“Why do you do this, Fräulein; it will make the Herr Doctor angry perhaps.”

“Then don’t tell about it.”

“And I am a German. You must hate all Germans; they make you work all day so hard. In my country no woman would bind up the arm of an enemy.”

Marieken shrugged her shoulders and laughed softly.

“Remember that, Herr Hendrick, the next time you say my Belgium is part of your country, will you?” she asked.

Hendrick nodded.

“You are a strange little girl, but I thank you,” he said gruffly.

“Oh, you’re quite welcome,” Marieken replied, as she returned to the house. “Try and go to sleep; you’ll be able to now.”

She found the three soldiers in the kitchen and hurried to give them their cookies. They departed gleefully.

Marieken watched them go with a sigh of relief. She made a plate of dainty sandwiches, went down in the cellar, and brought back a small bottle of wine. She put them both on a tray with a fresh napkin over the plate. Then she stood still, looking hard at the floor.

“Papa dear, it is not the best wine,” she whispered, “and I think you must understand.” Then as if she had finished a little prayer she straightened her back and took the tray up to the General’s room and put it on the table beside his bed.

Once back in the kitchen again, she made haste to bolt the windows and doors and to pull down the shades.

“And now, Herr Sentry, I am going to bed,” she said to herself, as she picked up the lamp and with much clatter of wooden sabots she climbed up the ladder to the attic she shared with her mother.

She put the lamp on the ledge of the window, waited a few minutes, and then with an unlighted candle in her hand she slipped downstairs again and into the cellar.

When she came back two hours later her cheeks were flushed and her hands were covered with dirt.

“Is that you, Henri?” her mother asked fretfully, as she climbed again to the attic.

“No, dearest little Mama, it is Marieken; don’t you remember, Henri has gone to the city with papa; soon they will come back.”

She patted her mother’s gray hair and made her drink a little milk, and sat beside her, holding her hand until she dropped off again to sleep.

Then she tiptoed to the chimney at the end of

the attic and took out a grubby note book and a stubby little pencil from a chink in the wall.

Several of the pages were filled with x's and names in uneven columns.

Marieken turned to the last one and began to write:

“To Herr Captain Hein, for calling my kitchen German, xx.

“To Fritz Horvitz, for saying I was almost as good as a German girl, xxx.

“To the General, for that kiss, xxxxxxxxxxxx.”

She made the entries neatly and returned book and pencil to their hidingplace. Then she undressed hurriedly, blew out the lamp, and crawled into bed.

She was soon asleep, one arm thrown protectingly about her mother.

CHAPTER III

A NEW ARRIVAL

THE next morning Marieken slipped out before any one was awake and hurried to the chicken house that occupied one corner of the farmyard. In the days before the war Monsieur De Bruin had been very proud of his chickens.

The Inn had been famous for its fresh eggs and tender broilers, and therefore the demands for omelet had been great, that was why Marieken had become so proficient in the making of them.

Now, however, the number of hens had greatly diminished and the poor, bedraggled rooster did not strut around with his usual bravado.

“Good morning, my chicks,” Marieken called as she unfastened the door.

“How many eggs have you for me?”

Four big yellow hens flew off their roosts and clucked excitedly.

“Funny things,” Marieken laughed, “I believe you all want me to look in your nests first; such jealousy I never saw. Go way with you and don’t make too much noise for I don’t want the old General to know that Monsieur Le Curé gets the best of your eggs.”

The hens strutted off to peck in the ground for a possible bit of grain, and Marieken, after a hasty look about her, slipped four large white eggs into her basket and returned to the house.

No one stirred upstairs for it was only a little after dawn, and after throwing a little black shawl over her shoulders she went out again with the eggs hidden under her apron.

It was a long way to Father Dacklin’s little cottage, and Marieken had a chance to see all the ugly wounds that the war had inflicted on Zandre. Desolation and ruin were on every side. Many of the little houses were without roofs; all were without windows. No smiling women with jolly babies in their arms came to the doors to call a welcome.

A cloud of fear and apprehension hung over the villagers. In the distance the dreary rumble of the guns served as a fitting background.

It was a depressing sight and she hurried on, trying not to look at the wasteful desolation. But although she could keep her eyes before her she could not keep her mind from dwelling on the past.

It was a habit of her's to talk to her father as if he were just beside her, and it seemed as if his spirit always answered and gave her the courage that she sought. To-day she was very lonely and very discouraged, the war seemed to color the past and obscure the future. She could think of nothing but the dull monotony of gray days, punctuated with the arrival of the troops, and more troops.

"And once we were so happy," she said aloud. "So happy and contented, Papa. Do you remember the last time you and I walked down this road, it was on a feast day, and Henri was coming home? We walked to the station in the twilight to meet him; he was so gay and happy, he held me up in his strong arms and kissed me, and what presents

he brought! A shawl for Mama, a new pipe for you, a fan for Jeanneken, tops for the boys, and a doll for me—a doll with brown eyes and curly brown hair, and a pink dress, and I played with it. Oh, Papa, that was so many years ago.”

Marieken stopped in her walk, aghast at the change in herself. To her worried, embittered little mind it seemed incredulous to think that she had ever played with a doll and been happy. War is a grim instructor. Marieken had been under its tutelage for a long hard year.

“Papa, Papa, will it never end?” she cried.

Only the distressful moaning of the wind in the bare tree tops seemed to answer her, but from within herself a spirit kind and strong seemed to quiet the beating of her heart, and a voice whispered “Courage, my little daughter, your chance is not far off.”

Marieken nodded her head as if in answer. The determined line came back to her trembling lips, and because she was the merriest and bravest of girls her eyes laughed up at the threatening sky.

She had fully recovered her old fearlessness by the time she reached the church.

She ran around the corner and up the tiny path, now overgrown with weeds, to the door of Father Dacklin's cottage.

She knocked.

A cheery voice called, "come in," and she pushed open the door, a gust of wind blew her scanty black skirt and sent her hair flying about her head.

She curtsied respectfully and uncovered the basket.

Father Dacklin got up from his place at the center table and came to greet her with outstretched hands.

"Ah, my little Marieken, I am glad to see you, come and warm yourself by the fire," he said, taking her hands.

Marieken shook her head. "I have only a minute, mon Père," she replied, closing the door behind her, "I slipped out before the General was awake." She looked around the room and sighed,

an exaggerated sigh accompanied by a slow nod of her head.

The room was a man's room, cluttered with books and untidily comfortable.

"Just as I expected," she said, "well I shall have to speak to her again."

Father Dacklin held up his hands in protest.

"My dear child, please don't, I am quite all right," he said anxiously, "Mère Marie came yesterday and I sent her away, poor soul she was too tired to work. The soldiers are worrying her, I fear, you must not scold her for she really wanted to put me to rights."

Marieken did not reply. She set about straightening the table and dusting.

In a surprisingly short time the room was in good order, and she disappeared into the kitchen to return with a dainty breakfast on a tray.

"Oh, but my dear child, you should not have done that," Father Dacklin protested, "with all the work you have to do to take time to worry about an old man."

“Old man, what! Nonsense, mom Père, you are not old, and I love to work for those I love, I have so little chance now,” Marieken replied, angrily. “No one, no, not even you, my very good friend will ever know how I hate serving that fat General.”

“You are a brave little one, so brave in the face of so many hardships that I marvel at your great spirit.”

Marieken looked at the old man as he spoke.

“I can be patient, mon Père, and it is easy to be brave when one has plans,” she hesitated and added hurriedly. “But come, eat your breakfast.”

“Stay and share it with me,” Father Dacklin invited.

“No, I must hurry back, the General will be cross.”

Marieken picked up the basket and sighed, the light and laughter died out of her eyes, and the old patient expression came back to her face.

Half way across the room she stopped.

“I suppose there is no news?” she asked. She

hesitated, and her voice fell. "News of Henri, I mean," she added.

Father Dacklin looked at her and winced.

"Courage, my child, I have no news so far," he said. He went to her and put his arm about her thin little shoulders, protectingly.

"But soon we are sure to hear, there is no way to receive a letter just now, and to send one—"

He pointed a trembling finger out of the window. Marieken looked. At one end of the little street she could see a German flag waving over the postoffice.

"To send one," the Curé repeated, "one must use a German stamp."

Marieken gave a short, grim little laugh, and her eyes flashed.

"If we must never hear, mon Père, we will never do that," she said with spirit.

The Curé looked at her approvingly. Under the humble garb of a priest he had a stout and loyal Belgian heart.

"Quite right, my child, but if we put our trust

in the good God above and wait patiently all will be well."

"All will be well," Marieken repeated as she picked up her basket and started back to the Inn.

As she crossed the market square a sentry stopped her, more for something to do than from a sense of duty.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

Marieken regarded him with gravity, her head on one side. "To Berlin to take breakfast with the Kaiser, stupid," she replied in rapid Flemish, and passed on.

The sentry was slow of thought as well as action, and Marieken was out of sight before he realized that her use of his Emperor's name might not have been a complimentary one.

When she reached the Inn she was surprised to find an unusual stir and bustle in the courtyard. A half dozen horses were pawing the ground impatiently, and farther down the road a small detachment of mounted men waited at attention.

She hurried into the kitchen.

Fritz was standing over the stove.

“Ah, Fräulein,” he exclaimed, gratefully, “you have come. The Herr General is waiting for his chocolate, and I was trying to make it; he is in a fury of rage.”

Marieken took the command at once. The Officers had already breakfasted before she went out. With the assistance of the excited Fritz, the chocolate, toast and egg were soon ready, and Marieken, inwardly trembling, but outwardly calm, carried the tray to the General.

He was pacing up and down the floor, his hands clasped behind him. When he saw Marieken he stopped and frowned.

“So you have come back, eh? Do you know I have had to *wait* for my breakfast.”

“Indeed, yes, Herr General, Fritz told me; what a pity. If you had but told me last night that you were going away so early all this delay might have been saved,” Marieken replied cheerfully.

“Where were you?” the General demanded.

“Out looking for eggs, Herr General; where else should I be at this hour? And of course I thought you were still asleep, and to think I did

not find any either! Those guns of yours have scared all the chickens that your soldiers have not stolen. Well—" with a shrug, "it can't be helped. But eat your breakfast, Herr General, or the chocolate will be quite cold," she finished sweetly.

General Von Dulk sat down before the tray and subsided into a series of grunts, and Captain Hein turned to Marieken.

"Wish me luck, little spitfire; my turn has come, we hope to fight to-day."

"What do you call luck, Herr Captain?" Marieken inquired politely.

"Oh, to meet with some of your chicken-hearted countrymen," the Captain replied, grinning.

Marieken flushed, indignant at the insult, but she smiled sweetly as she replied, "Then I wish you much luck, Herr Captain."

"To-night I will bring back five new Officers with me; do you hear? See that you have a good dinner, and don't go gathering eggs again." The General was speaking; his tone had softened a

little, for his mouth was full of toast, and he was decidedly cheered by the chocolate.

Marieken dropped a little curtsy and mumbled "Yes, Herr General," very meekly.

The General nodded, finished his breakfast, and, his appetite satisfied, as well as his pride, he shouted some order to his Officers, mounted his horse, and rode off down the village street.

Marieken watched the shiny black, patent-leather helmets and bright steel spear heads dazzling in the sunshine, and listened until the last clatter of the horses' hoofs was lost in the rumble of the guns. When there was nothing left but a cloud of dust that was caught up and whirled angrily away by the wind, she went into the house and set methodically about her work.

A persistent knocking at the back door brought her from the top floor down to the kitchen.

Mère Marie, one of the oldest women in the village, and one of the few who had refused to leave her home during the bombardment, was waiting to be let in.

Marieken opened the heavy door, and she stumbled into the room.

“They have killed Fifi!” she exclaimed, excitedly, “before my very eyes—they have killed her—what shall I do? What shall I do? I try to save her, my little love, but one great beast knock me out of the way and, there, in her own home, they kill her.” The poor old ragged form of skin and bones shook convulsively.

Marieken patted her shoulder tenderly.

“There, there, Mère Marie, it’s too bad but you must not cry so; stop and I will give you one of my littlest geese to take home with you, and I’ll ask the Herr General to tell his soldiers to leave you alone.”

But Mère Marie refused to be comforted; her dearest possession, a big white goose, had been taken from her, and her poor old heart was broken.

At last Marieken, with the aid of a little milk and a crust of bread, made her stop crying.

“And now that you are here you must help me with my work,” she said, “wash up those dishes for me, like a dear, and then we will sit down and

have a little something to eat; it's not long before lunch time."

Mère Marie set about her task, crooning softly to herself, and Marieken, after a hasty glance toward the stables, started down the cellar steps.

"If you see any Germans, Mère Marie," she said, "don't be afraid; come downstairs and call me."

Once in the cellar, she lighted a stump of a candle and groped her way to the farthest end. From the inside of an empty wine barrel she took out a shovel. After listening intently for a full minute, she set resolutely to work.

When she returned to the kitchen Mère Marie had gone; an empty milk jug and some crumbs bore evidence that she had eaten her lunch.

Marieken glanced at the clock; it was a quarter past three. She washed her hands carefully and started to prepare dinner.

Just as the sun was setting behind the broken spire of the little church, the General and his staff returned. Marieken heard the ring of their spurs as they dismounted and the short guttural orders,

but she did not go near the front of the house until the dinner was ready.

The General was in a jovial mood; he had apparently forgotten her offense of the morning, for when she came in with the soup tureen he patted her cheek and winked slyly at her.

“Our little *fräulein*, the finest cook in Germany,” he explained to the new Officers. “She makes us forget she was ever a Belgian.”

Marieken looked at the new faces around the table. Lieutenant Strenger and the Doctor were the only old Officers left, but except for names the new ones were almost exactly the same in face and manners, all except one tall, very thin man with a fair mustache and big serious blue eyes. He was Lieutenant Teutch.

Marieken noticed he did not smile with the rest, and when the General chucked her playfully under the chin he frowned.

“By thunder but this is delicious soup!” a very fat, very pink Major who sat at the General’s right exclaimed.

“So, so,” the General admitted, “but not so

good as last night, eh, little cook? Last night we had an onion broth. *Himmel*. After this war is over I will take Marieken to Berlin to cook for me, and some day she will make an onion soup for the Emperor. How will you like that, hey?"

Marieken lowered her eyes and curtsied politely.

"I will like very well to make that soup, Herr General," she replied.

When she lifted her head she found she was looking straight into the eyes of Lieutenant Teutch, and the amused expression in them made her feel that he understood with her, what the ingredients of that particular soup would be, but the knowledge somehow did not frighten her, and her eyes smiled in answer to his.

CHAPTER IV

SOPHIE RETURNS

A SUCCESSION of rainy days followed one another in endless monotony.

Zandre was wrapped in a merciful haze that covered some of the ugly wounds.

Detachments of German soldiers tramped doggedly through the mud with the same stolid expression of indifference that they wore in the sunshine.

Marieken watched them from the kitchen window and wondered.

“What do you think about when you march like that, Hendrick?” she asked one day as the soldier was sitting before the fire, waiting to have his arm rebandaged.

“Different things, Fräulein,” he replied surprised. “Sometimes home, sometimes of dinner and sometimes of nothing at all.”

“Do you like to fight?” Marieken inquired.

Hendrick looked puzzled.

“If Germany goes to war, we must fight,” he replied, and then added in a sing-song voice as if he were reciting a lesson, “This is a good and just war, and the Imperial German Government was forced into it.”

Marieken looked at him pityingly, but she finished her bandaging in silence and returned to the window.

Hendrick lumbered out to the barn.

The scene through the window was not a cheerful one; she sighed wearily, and fell to watching a solitary figure that was coming up the road. He was walking quickly, and by the set of his shoulders and the way he held his head she recognized him as Lieutenant Teutch.

Just as he passed a tumbled-down cottage that stood by the road, a half-starved, forlorn, yellow dog ran out to him.

Marieken closed her eyes to avoid seeing the kick that after six months' experience she felt sure would follow, but when she opened them again Lieutenant Teutch was patting the dog's head af-

fectionately. She watched in surprise as he took out something from his pocket and gave it to him to eat.

“For a German,” she said to herself, “you are almost nice.”

A voice in the courtyard interrupted further musing, and she hurried out to see what was the matter. One glance made her open the door and go out, regardless of the rain.

An old man with a gaudy-colored quilt over his head and trailing in the mud behind him, was the center of a group of jeering soldiers.

It was Jacques, the village carpenter. Some of the men were pelting him with stones. Marieken descended into the midst of the group like a little fury.

“Fritz, Hans, and you, Hendrick, shame on you to hit an old man! Go along this instant, or I will make you very sorry.”

The men looked up; several arms dropped and there was a general move toward the barn.

Two or three, however, stood their ground, and Carl, a big clumsy, brutal creature, laughed at her

and hit old Jacques a stunning blow with the palm of his hand, that sent him into the mud.

For the first time since the war, Marieken lost her temper. Her calm self-control gave way and she forgot her careful plans for the future.

With eyes flashing she flew at the big German and beat his face with her clinched fists.

“You coward, you great bully, you dog of a German,” she cried furiously.

It is impossible to say just what might have happened. Carl had no more respect for a little girl than he had for an old man, and the chances are Marieken would have found herself beside Jacques in the mud had not Lieutenant Teutch come around the corner at that moment.

The soldiers came to attention at once and saluted.

Lieutenant Teutch did not ask any questions. He uttered a few low commands, and they slunk off to the barn.

Marieken turned and waited. All Belgium had learned to their cost the penalty for striking a German soldier.

Lieutenant Teutch looked at her, a queer expression in his eyes, but he did not speak; instead he bowed ceremoniously and went into the Inn.

Marieken hurried to Jacques; the blow had stunned him, but he was slowly regaining consciousness. She helped him to his feet and led him gently, bearing most of his weight on her own shoulders, to his cottage.

“Why did you come? Did you want me?” she asked, as they paused to rest.

Jacques nodded.

“Sophie has returned,” he whispered. “She came in last night; she got past the sentry and she is in my attic. She is cold and tired for she has walked for days, but she brings news. I wanted you to hear.”

Marieken laid a finger on his lips for a sentry was passing them on the road, but she quickened her pace; they did not speak again until they were in Jacques’ cottage.

Sophie was Jacques’ eldest daughter. Her husband and son were both in the army and she had left the village at the first order to evacuate.

When Marieken climbed to the attic with Jacques, she was lying on a pile of straw in one corner, and she looked wan and tired; her hair, that Marieken remembered as chestnut color, was gray. Beside her, cuddled close for the warmth, was a little boy.

“Albert!” Marieken exclaimed joyfully. “My little Albert!”

The baby opened his eyes and tried to smile. She took him up in her arms and held him tight.

“I knew you would be glad,” Sophie said happily. “I promised Jeanneken to bring him to you.”

Marieken looked up, fear in her eyes.

“Where is Jeanneken?” she asked. “She is not—?”

“No, no, dear, she is well, I know,” Sophie hastened to assure her, “or at least she was when I last saw her, many months ago.”

“Tell me everything,” Marieken begged, “if you are not too tired.”

Sophie shook her head.

“I am not tired,” she said, “but there is little

to tell. Jeanneken went with us, as you remember, carrying baby Albert; after days on the road, with very little food, she gave up. I am strong so I took him. Later when we came to a town and the people were good to us, I kept him with me. Jeanneken had Josef with her. Then the Germans came, and we had to go again. I do not know what became of Jeanneken; there was no time to find her when the order came; we were in different parts of the town, so I left with Albert."

"Go on, go on," old Jacques prompted from his seat in the corner. "Tell her about the English."

"There was much fighting for days; they bombarded the town and shells burst all around us; we had to sleep on the ground under haystacks when we were lucky enough to find them. Then, one day as we were walking along the road, we saw soldiers coming; we hid, thinking they were Germans, but they were the English. They stopped and gave us food; one could speak French and he told us news. Everywhere, he said, the English and the French and our Belgians were winning,"—her eyes filled with tears. "Oh, he was a kind

man, that Englishman; he patted little Albert's cheek and told him some day he could have the Kaiser's sword to play with."

Marieken clapped her hands delightedly.

"I knew it, I knew it; soon the good God will send the brave Englishmen to Zandre, and I, Marieken, can box the Herr General's ears and tweak his nose," she exclaimed joyfully.

"Gently, gently," old Jacques cautioned; "the English are not here yet, my little fighting cock; be careful."

Marieken sighed.

"No, you are right, Papa Jacques; I can wait. In the meantime there is the Herr General's dinner."

She kissed Sophie tenderly and put the sleeping Albert back in her arms. After a promise to come back the next day, and to stop in and tell the Curé the news, she left them.

All the way home she sang snatches of songs. The rain had stopped and a pink cloud in the west heralded the sunset.

Lieutenant Teutch was sitting before the stove,

smoking, when Marieken entered the kitchen. He stood up when he saw her.

“I am sorry, Fräulein, that my men acted as they did this afternoon,” he said politely.

Marieken was busy hanging up her wet cloak and she barely noticed him.

“It was nothing, Herr Lieutenant,” she said with a shrug of her shoulders, and took down a bowl from the shelf.

Lieutenant Teutch watched her for a while in silence.

“Don’t you ever get tired?” he asked finally.

Marieken laughed.

“Not of work,” she replied, “but of other things—yes.”

“The General tells me your mother is ill upstairs,” he said after another pause.

“My mother has lost her mind, Herr Lieutenant,” Marieken replied quietly.

“Oh, I am so sorry for that, if there is anything we can do—” the Lieutenant began, but she interrupted.

“Can you bring back my father whom you

killed, or my brother whom you are trying to kill?" she asked angrily.

Lieutenant Teutch shook his head and went over to the window.

"No, Fräulein, that they cannot do," he said sadly.

Marieken was a little ashamed of her ungracious reply. After all, this man was trying to be as kind as he could. She made up her mind that the next question he asked she would take pains in answering politely, but Lieutenant Teutch did not ask any more questions; he stood looking moodily down the road.

Marieken began to feel uncomfortable. She finished peeling the potatoes for dinner and went over and stood beside him at the window.

"To-morrow will be a beautiful day, Herr Lieutenant," she said softly. Lieutenant Teutch looked down at her, but his reply was cut short by a sudden commotion in the barnyard.

Carl was trying to lead one of the horses to drink, and for some reason the animal was resisting his efforts. He pulled and yanked for a min-

ute or so and then, his ugly temper getting the better of him, he kicked the horse and beat him brutally over the head with a heavy stick he was carrying.

Marieken held her breath. The powerful horse reared to his hind legs. There was a spatter of mud and dirt, and then the sight of Carl lying on the ground, an ugly gash in his forehead, the horse rolling frantically on top of him.

Marieken looked at her companion, his face had gone white, and then an angry red mounted to his temples. He brought his fist down on the window ledge.

“You big hulking brute, you; it serves you jolly well right!” he exclaimed.

Marieken jumped as though she had been shot; a stifled exclamation broke from her.

Lieutenant Teutch had spoken in English, and though she could not make out a word that he had said, a great light of understanding shone in her eyes as she turned and faced him.

CHAPTER V

A NIGHT ALARM

“**E**NGLISH!” The word, spoken with a wealth of relief, joy and awe, escaped her.

Lieutenant Teutch clapped his hand over her mouth and looked quickly behind him.

“Marieken,” he said in French, “you must never even *think* that word again, do you understand?”

Marieken had recovered her self-possession.

“Yes, I understand,” she said proudly, “of course I understand. Do you think when I waited so long for you to come that I will do anything foolish? Watch, you will see.”

Without another word they went out to the assistance of Carl.

He was badly hurt, and while Marieken did what

she could for him Lieutenant Teutch went off to find the Doctor.

That night the work was hurried through. The kitchen was locked up at an early hour, and Marieken, carrying her lamp, made an extra noise as she went upstairs. Hendrick, who was on sentry duty, noticed it and said to himself, "Poor child, she is tired." He would have been a surprised boy had he seen her five minutes later creeping back down the stairs, and stealthily groping her way to the end of the cellar.

She worked with a feverish energy at her digging, for the long-hoped-for time was in sight, and she did not want to be found unprepared.

It was after eleven o'clock when her tired, aching, little back gave out. As she felt her way back to the stairs she was conscious of a loud rapping above her.

She turned cold with fear and her head whirled. Her first thought was that the sentry had heard her, but after a second her reason asserted itself and she realized that if that were the case he wouldn't make so much noise about it. By the

time she had reached the stairs some of her terror had left her, and she groped her way carefully to the kitchen door and listened.

The rapping came from the front of the house. As she waited it stopped, and she heard a voice say,

“An important message just received for the Herr General.”

Without loss of time she opened the door, listened an instant and then ran hurriedly up the ladder to the attic.

Something was about to happen, and she knew that if she were wanted she had better be found quite naturally in her own bed.

She snuggled close to her mother and waited breathlessly. Footsteps that she could not locate, and shouted commands that she could not understand, broke the silence.

At last she heard some one in the kitchen below; perhaps the General had sent Fritz to wake her. She was undecided what to do when she heard some one stealthily climbing up the ladder.

She crawled to the opening and looked down.

“Who is it?” she demanded.

A whisper, hardly audible, answered in French.

“Don’t be frightened, it is I.”

In the pitch dark Marieken felt a big hand close over hers and knew that it belonged to Lieutenant Teutch.

“What do you want me to do?” she asked.

“Have they found you out?”

“No, worse than that. Listen to me, Marieken,” he spoke hurriedly, “there is no time to explain. The General has just received orders to send out detachments; there is to be a tremendous surprise attack at dawn on our trenches,”—Marieken knew instinctively that he meant the English trenches. “We leave at once. I cannot get through the lines in time to warn them. Here are the plans. Are there any boys left in the village who will risk taking them through?”

Marieken’s small hand gripped the larger one excitedly, but her voice was quite steady as she answered.

“Yes, I know of one. Give me the letter and I’ll take it to him. Tell me how to go.”

“Out of the village, by the main road, through the woods to the right until you come to the river. Tell him to follow the stone wall that skirts the woods so he won’t get lost, over the pontoon bridge.”

“The sentry?” Marieken whispered interrogatively.

“I’ll give you the watchword for to-night. Turn sharp to your right after that until you come to a farm house.”

“The Trichs farm,” Marieken nodded, “I know; go on.”

“Give it a wide berth; there’s a gun in the corner of the barn yard; the Boches’ trenches are on the left; keep well to the right, you’ll come to a brook and a very small wood, cut through them and you will be abreast of our line.” He handed her a folded slip of paper.

“Tell him to get this over the parapet somewhere,” he sighed heavily. “If he doesn’t succeed they’ll be murdered like rats. The password is Potsdam.”

“Then your line is just outside of Bontige?”
Marieken said.

“Yes.”

“Then I know. Does the General leave too?”
Lieutenant Teutch laughed grimly.

“Oh, yes; he wants to be there at the surrender, he says; he will watch from a safe distance.”

Marieken breathed with relief.

“Then I can leave without being missed,” she said, more to herself than to the Lieutenant. “I promise you the letter will be delivered.” Her voice trembled and Lieutenant Teutch put his arm around her.

“Good-by,” he said, “please God it will.”

“Good-by.” Marieken kissed his hand timidly, and she added hurriedly, “If you come back remember that there is always a safe place to hide in Zandre, and always food for the English.”

“Good enough,” the Lieutenant laughed. He was a little embarrassed and very much touched. “I’ll remember. Good luck,” and he was gone.

Marieken sat very still and wasted several pre-

cious minutes thinking, then she went to the box in the corner and took out a pair of shoes. In the days of peace they had been her delight, and she had taken special care of them. Now they were to be put to the test; sabots were too clumsy for such a perilous journey.

With her finger nail she loosened the inside sole of one of them and tore it almost out; then she flattened the letter—it was a small one—and slipped it in between the two soles.

She pulled the shoe on; it was lumpy, but she thought she could wear it.

From a pile of clothes she selected a dark blue smock that had belonged to Josef, and a short pair of trousers. She put them on swiftly, twisted her hair up and tucked it under a cap that she pulled down well over her eyes.

She had dreamed and planned so often of just such a venture that her mind worked methodically. She had discarded the Lieutenant's directions as too risky; she knew the country well and she thought that by taking a route across fields she

would be able to make Bontige without meeting with any sentries; common sense warned her that even with the password a Belgian boy, traveling forbidden roads in the dead of night, would be held and questioned. As a last precaution she tied up a small bundle of miscellaneous things in a bandanna handkerchief, for if the worse came to the worse and she was discovered, she meant to pose as a wandering refugee.

Her preparations completed, she knelt down beside her mother and kissed her tenderly.

Then, without giving her courage a chance to flag, she stole softly down the ladder.

There was a great noise of confusion outside and she hoped to escape under cover of it, but as she entered the kitchen by one door, Fritz with a candle in his hand came in through another.

There was not a second to be lost. Marieken ran to the big door that led to the yard and opened and closed it hastily. A cold blast of air whirled into the kitchen, and, as she had hoped, blew out the candle. She heard Fritz swear under his breath.

“What is it you want, Fritz?” she called sleepily, “and what is all this fuss about? I was sound asleep and I thought the world was coming to an end.”

“Oh, it’s you, is it? A curse on this candle,” Fritz growled. “The General sent me to tell you that we are going off at once and that there may be fighting, and for you to put your eggs in a safe place.”

“Is that all,” Marieken replied crossly. “Well, tell him I will, and now go away and let me go back to bed.”

She heard Fritz laugh in the darkness, and the grateful sound of the door swinging to.

She waited for a little until her eyes became used to the darkness and her ears to the various sounds, then she slipped quietly across the room, opened the door softly, and stole out into the night.

CHAPTER VI

HOW THE LETTER WAS DELIVERED

LIGHTS flashed, and shouts from the men broke the stillness.

Marieken crept close to the house until she came to the corner. No one was in sight in the direction of the outhouses, so that for the first few hundred yards her way was safe.

It is said that war sharpens the wits and makes heroes or cowards of us all. There is no room for the medium folk. It was true, at least in the case of Marieken. Her quick little brain had grasped the importance of her errand, and the necessity of delivering that letter to the English trenches crowded out all thoughts of personal fear.

Once free of the immediate vicinity of the Inn, she remembered that Sophie had come through the fields from the south and escaped the sentry, so instead of taking to the main road she cut across

an orchard and was soon lost in a maze of shell holes and mud. The gaunt, twisted tree trunks, stripped of all their branches, loomed black and threatening under the pale light of the stars.

To reach the wood that Lieutenant Teutch had directed, Marieken had to cross the main road, but instead of crossing it in the village, where the guards were many, she chose a place farther along. It would take more time, but she quickened her steps to make up for the delay.

Nothing but an occasional hare, or the breaking of a twig, disturbed her, and she was growing accustomed to the darkness. Over toward the north the guns kept up a low grumbling roar.

Marieken had once known every foot of the country about her, but now old landmarks had given place to shell holes, and all that was left of some of the fences were a few scattered stones, so that she was a little confused and reached the road before she realized it.

As she stopped to get her bearings she heard the thud, thud of boots not twenty feet from her; the sentry was coming. Without waiting for a sec-

and she threw herself flat on the ground and rolled into a ditch in the shadow of a hedge.

The sentry passed, and the sound of his footsteps grew faint. Marieken jumped up. The ditch had been half full of water and not the most comfortable of hidingplaces, but the cold water angered rather than depressed her, and she darted across the road, determined that she would not be taken unaware again.

Once in the woods she followed the Lieutenant's directions and went straight toward the noise of the guns. She was just a little bit tired, for progress was slow and the ruts and mud of the woods, with the occasional fallen trees that made her stumble, made it impossible to hurry. The cold water from the ditch had chilled her, but her spirit never flagged, and her mind was kept busy planning a way to elude the sentry at the bridge.

"If I could swim," she thought to herself sadly, but was immediately cheered by the realization that even if she could it would hardly be sensible to attempt a very swift river in the middle of winter.

When she reached the edge of the wood the noise of the guns, and the rattle of heavy motors made her stop and listen.

Whatever she was going to do must be done quickly. She was on the bank of the river, not a stone's throw from the bridge. She crouched down and waited for a noise that she had learned to know caught her attention. It was the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the even gait of a detachment of German cavalry; she hid behind a stump. They came nearer on the road directly beneath her; she could almost feel the hot breath of the horses, and some of the men's voices came up to her, gruff and sullen. They were above the bridge and were apparently going on to a farther position behind their lines.

Marieken waited until they were past and slipped to the bank of the river under the noise of the horses' hoofs.

There were two sentries on the bridge; she could see them as they walked mechanically back and forth, and for a minute her heart sank as she realized that she must pass them.

Then a sudden idea came to her. The bridge was narrow, and to cross it was only a matter of a minute if she could only attract the sentries, attention farther up the bank.

A big charred piece of log caught her eye. It was heavy and stuck fast in the ground, but by pulling and pushing she loosened it and sent it rolling down the bank. It made a loud splash as it reached the water.

Marieken waited to hear it and then darted across the road. She laid down flat in the mud and crawled cautiously along.

The sentries did exactly what she had expected them to do. They both hurried from their places and came to investigate the splash.

Marieken wriggled to the bridge and was across it before they returned.

Once on the other side she paused for breath, but not for long; the most perilous part of her journey was ahead, and if the letter was not delivered before dawn it would be too late. The little light that the sky gave was rapidly growing less as the stars disappeared. A cold sharp wind

blew up with a horrible smell that made Marieken shudder.

She crawled along on her hands and knees until she was far out of sight of the bridge, and then, after listening intently, she got up and ran. A sudden terror of being lost in that strange and terrible spot took possession of her.

The violent exercise made the blood race through her veins and warmed her chilled little body. After a few minutes her fear left her and she was able to think clearly again.

It was too dark to distinguish anything.

The guns were roaring constantly, but most of the shells exploded so far away that the sudden light did not help.

She knew she must be somewhere near the Trichs farm, but she did not dare to move for fear of taking the wrong direction.

She sat down in a muddy shell hole to wait, and tried staring hard in every direction, but the inky darkness that precedes the dawn blotted out the shapes of even the nearest objects.

The minutes wore on; Marieken felt the letter

in the sole of her shoe, and trembled. Then she fell to her knees.

“Papa, Papa, show me the way, I am frightened,” she cried.

As if in answer to her prayer a sudden flare of blue-green light, heralded by a hideous, screeching noise, illuminated the country for a full second.

But it was long enough for Marieken to see the farm on one side, and to the right the line of English trenches. She crawled hurriedly out of her hole and made toward them. The shells whizzed over her head, but she stared resolutely ahead in the darkness, afraid to close her eyes lest she lose the direction.

When she had crawled for about five hundred yards she could distinguish voices, and she stopped suddenly to listen.

“Wish something would happen; I’m no end sick of this waiting,” a voice unlike any she had ever heard said.

“Old Fritz is keeping quiet to-night, isn’t he; maybe he’s planning a bit of a surprise.” The



“She threw the letter over the top of the parapet”

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answer came again in that strange tongue and in the strange voice.

Marieken knew they were talking English. She put her hand out and felt a soft damp something that she knew was a sand bag. Her task was done. She took off her shoe; it was caked with mud, and her fingers were so numb with the cold that she could hardly undo the knots in the laces, but at last she held the letter in her hand. For a minute the temptation to call out to the men that she was there, and to receive the warm care that she knew they would give her, made her hesitate, but only for a minute. The face of her mother in the attic at the Inn and the work in the cellar that was almost completed made her pull on the shoe again and straighten her shoulders. She threw the letter over the top of the parapet and crawled hurrriedly away again back over No Man's Land.

CHAPTER VII

THE SECRET OF THE DAIRY CELLAR

IT was dawn when Marieken, weary and bedraggled, reached home. She entered the house cautiously and climbed up the ladder to her room.

After taking off the wet clothes and hiding them, she snuggled down beside her mother who was sleeping as peacefully as a child.

The warmth and security made her heart stop thumping. Her tired little brain relaxed and she was soon sound asleep.

When she awoke it was two o'clock in the afternoon. A pale yellow sun was shining dismally from its setting of sullen gray clouds, and there was an unnatural stillness in the courtyard.

Marieken's first thought was that she was hungry, and then the events of the night before crowded into her mind.

Her mother moved restlessly on the mattress beside her.

“Poor little Mama, you are hungry too,” Marieken laughed, a little tremble in her voice; “but I will bring you something right away. I did not know I would sleep so long.”

She slipped into the black smock and sabots and hurried to the kitchen. The house seemed deserted. She made a fire in the stove and set about the work for the day as if there had been no strange trip through the blackness to No Man’s Land.

By the time she had straightened up the rooms—no small task—she sat down before the kitchen stove to think.

The heavy rumble of the guns seemed to come nearer as she listened.

“Lieutenant Teutch will come again,” she said to herself, “and I promised him that there would always be plenty of food for the English. If that is so, I mustn’t sit here just thinking; there is work to be done.”

She got up slowly, for she was still very stiff

and tired, and walked to the center table. A terrific explosion that sounded as if it must have been just in the courtyard made her jump. It was followed by another and another.

Marieken ran to the window. The heavy cloud of smoke that always hung in the sky to the north seemed to be right on the edge of the village.

The house shook at each new report.

Marieken stood still, uncertain what to do. As she looked down the road she saw the Curé, almost dragging Mère Marie, coming toward the Inn. She ran to the door and opened it.

"My child, you are safe, what a blessing," Father Dacklin called to her. "I came this morning to see you and you were not here."

Marieken was tempted to tell where she had been, but in war times it is unfair to share a dangerous secret with any one, so she turned her attention to Mère Marie instead.

The old woman was screaming and trying to break away from the Curé.

"Come, come, you musn't act like this," Marie-

ken coaxed, "the English are coming in a little while; we will all be safe; don't cry."

"Hide me, hide me," Mère Marie begged. "The guns have come again."

Father Dacklin looked inquiringly at Marieken.

"Is your cellar dry?" he asked.

Marieken nodded.

"Not very, but it is safe," she said. "Take her down there quickly; she will not hear the guns so plainly. I must go to my mother."

Another explosion, nearer than the last, deafened them for a minute.

When it stopped, Marieken pointed to the woods; they were ablaze.

The sight seemed to steady her nerves and she shrugged her shoulders with characteristic calm.

"Hurry," she said, pointing to the cellar door.

She ran up to the attic and found her mother gazing stupidly out of the window. She was too weak to protest and Marieken had little trouble in getting her to the cellar.

The air was damp and cold. The old Curé was shivering as he tried to quiet Mère Marie.

Marieken had just time to seat her mother on an old wine barrel before a loud clattering and cries from above made her hurry back to the kitchen. She found Sophie, with Albert in her arms, and some of the other villagers.

“Marieken, Marieken, help us,” Sophie cried distractedly.

Marieken hurried them into the cellar. On the way down she asked, “Where is Papa Jacques?”

Sophie shuddered. “I don’t know; he would not come with me, though I begged. He said he must go out to welcome the English,” she replied hysterically. “Oh, he will be killed, I know,” she sobbed.

Marieken stopped on the bottom rung of the ladder, and then quite calmly she boxed Sophie’s ears. It was not a very strong blow, for there was little strength in her arms, but it acted as a tonic to the frightened girl.

She pulled herself together and her hand stopped trembling.

“You are right, Marieken; I am a great coward

and no Belgian. I will be brave, I promise," she said slowly.

"Then do as I tell you."

Marieken took the laughing Albert from her and gave him to her mother. Madame De Bruin seemed to understand what was expected of her and cradled him gently in her arms, then Marieken turned to Father Dacklin.

"Wait here for us," she whispered, and taking Sophie by the hand she lead the way back to the kitchen.

The roar of the guns was growing more intense and screeching shells fell perilously near the little village.

Marieken looked out of the kitchen door and motioned Sophie to be quiet. There was no one in the courtyard, and the few soldiers who were on duty on the main road were hurrying to obey the shouted commands of the officer of the day.

Marieken opened the door and darted across the courtyard, following by Sophie. She passed the barn and hurried to the dairy, a little one-

room stone building with a thatched roof, that was a few feet beyond.

The Inn was built in the shape of an **L** and all the out-buildings were connected by low stone walls. The dairy was at one end of the **L**.

In the days of prosperity, before the war, it had been a delightful room. Shining, spotless milk pails had stood neatly on the shelves, and there had always been the clean smell of sweet butter and milk, but with the coming of the Germans, who demanded the barn for sleeping quarters, the dairy had been converted into a cow shed for the two cows that remained after the preëmptory orders of the Imperial German Commisariat Department.

Now, in place of the old time tidiness, the floor was cluttered with hay and dirt. In the corner the butter churn was covered with cobwebs.

The two cows lifted their heads from the improvised feed box and looked inquiringly at Marieken as she entered. She patted each one on its cold damp nose.

“See, they’re not afraid,” she said, laughing, to Sophie.

Sophie nodded doubtingly. She could not credit their stolid indifference to courage.

“Silly beasts; they think it’s no more than a thunder shower,” she replied.

Another terrific explosion shook the earth under their feet, and Sophie asked hurriedly.

“What are we doing here, Marieken? Why don’t we go back to the cellar?”

For answer Marieken went to a corner of the room and brushed the straw away from a particular spot on the floor. As she did it she uncovered a ring sunk in one of the boards.

She tugged at it.

“Come and help, Sophie,” she whispered. “This is the trap-door into the dairy cellar. There, now, if we both pull hard—so.” They pulled and the door opened up, disclosing a tiny ladder. Marieken ran down it.

The air was cold, but it felt dry in comparison to the main cellar of the Inn.

“Pitch me down some hay,” she called; “that bundle over the butter churn.”

Sophie hastened to obey, and the floor of the cellar was soon covered.

“Now we will go back for the rest,” Marieken said as she came back up the ladder.

“I didn’t know you had a cellar under your dairy,” Sophie said wonderingly. “What did you keep down there.”

Marieken nodded wisely.

“My papa kept it a secret,” she explained. “It is where he stored all his best wine and kept his biggest hams.”

Sophie looked at her wonderingly. “And the Herr General never discovered it?”

Marieken laughed heartily.

“The Herr General is a stuck-up pig, who knows everything,” she replied, and added with a little chuckle. “Except what Marieken doesn’t wish him to know.”

They entered the house and hurried back to the Curé. Mère Marie was sobbing softly now, and Madame De Bruin was contentedly rocking the

baby Albert. The rest were stunned into a calm patience.

The transfer from one cellar to the other was made cautiously.

Father Dacklin lit a tallow candle, and Sophie covered the frightened woman up in the straw. She sat beside them while Marieken and the Curé went back to the Inn.

“What a brave little girl you are, child,” the old Curé said affectionately. “Surely the good God is sending the English as your reward.”

Marieken nodded. She was longing to bury her throbbing little head on the Curé’s shoulder and cry, but another bursting shell, followed by a glaring light, made her hurry to the window.

“My Father, look! The town hall!” she exclaimed. “Our Burgomaster!”

They ran bareheaded out of the house and down the road toward the blaze. Marieken soon left the Curé behind.

The town hall, the little postoffice and the Burgomaster’s cottage were at the other end of the village from the Inn. When Marieken had gone only

half the distance she could feel the heat of the flames on her face.

She slackened her pace, afraid to go on. Father Dacklin caught up with her.

“There is no use of going farther,” he said sadly; “no one could escape from that.” As he spoke a bent figure, carrying something on his back, came toward them.

It was Jacques. He was staggering under the weight of the Burgomaster. They ran to help him.

“Did you see that, my Father? A miracle, no less. The English guns free, they do not kill,” he called excitedly.

Father Dacklin and Marieken helped carry the stunned Burgomaster back to the cellar, and Jacques explained volubly the while.

“The shell bursts, did you hear it? A true marksman that gunner, straight in the middle of the town hall, crack go the walls, and as I told you a miracle, out tumbles our Burgomaster, stunned but safe. I, Jacques, am near the place. I pick him up and here we are,” he laughed, as only very

old people can laugh, making a dry cackling noise in his throat.

Sophie, at sight of his familiar figure, started to scold him for his foolhardiness, but old Jacques would not listen.

“You talk like a child,” he said. “I go now to take down the accursed German flag from our post-office.”

“No, no, Jacques, stay here quietly with us,” Father Dacklin protested.

But Jacques would have gone his own dangerous way had it not been for Marieken’s practical intervention.

“Tearing down German flags! What old man’s talk is that,” she demanded impatiently. “I tell you there is real work to do, come with me.”

Jacques grumbled a little but he followed her out of the dairy and over to the Inn kitchen.

Marieken lighted a candle and told him to follow her. She went through the cellar to the very end, and once again took out the spade from its hiding place. Then she moved a barrel and pointed to a hole in the wall.

“This cellar is only a little ways from the dairy, Jacques,” she explained. “See, I have started a tunnel, and it must be very nearly through.”

Jacques took the spade eagerly and crawled into the opening. The dirt began to fly. Marieken took a smaller shovel and packed it down in an empty wine barrel.

It was back-breaking work, but their efforts were soon rewarded by the sounds of the low voices in the dairy cellar. Jacques called and Father Dacklin answered him.

It was only the matter of a few minutes after that Marieken saw the light from the other candle. As soon as the opening was large enough Jacques climbed through, and Father Dacklin took his place.

The bombardment had grown less as they worked, and Marieken was afraid that the Germans had repulsed the British attack, and that the General might return at any moment. She had heard too much military talk at the table to take Jacques’s cheerful assurance “that all was well,” as truth.

Her fears were well founded, for she had barely pushed a barrel in front of the hole and obliterated the signs of their digging, when she heard the dreaded clatter of hoof-beats in the court.

She raced up the ladder just in time to see Hendrick covered from head to foot with mud, wide-eyed and disheveled, the blood pouring from one cheek, jump from his horse.

CHAPTER VIII

AN ANXIOUS EVENING

“**F**RÄULEIN, I am wounded,” he mumbled vacantly, as Marieken opened the kitchen door and he stumbled into the room.

She pushed him gently into a chair and ran for a basin of water. As she bathed his cheek she questioned him.

“Is the fight over?”

“How do I know?” he replied weakly; “for the night perhaps it is, but to-morrow it must begin again. The English have taken our front line trenches, our men are retreating in disorder.”

“Why did you come back here instead of going to the hospital at Voorle?” Marieken asked him gently.

Hendrick shook his head hopelessly. “My horse brought me, I guess, I don’t remember; I think the English have taken Voorle.”

“Will the General be back to-night?” Marieken asked anxiously.

“Yes, he will be here, and the men who are left; they are bringing a handful of prisoners.” He paused, then began again in a querulous voice.

“Why did everything go wrong, I wonder, Fräulein? We were told to wait on that hill for the word to charge. We should have cut off the enemy’s retreat, but how could we, they did not retreat; they came forward on the road to the rear of their trenches, and then we met more on the road. They are fools, those English, Fräulein; they laughed at us as we fought. To—laugh—as—you—fight—is—”

The warmth of the kitchen stove, and the comfort of the warm water stole over Hendrick, and his head dropped.

Marieken looked at him pityingly, but she was not through with her questioning, and she roused him with a little shake.

“Were any of the officers killed?” she demanded.

He looked at her wearily.

“I did not see, Fräulein, Captain Hein cut some of his men across the face. I saw him—some day I—”

“What about Lieutenant Teutch?” Marieken asked desperately, but this time Hendrick could not be roused to reply; his head fell back and he breathed deeply.

Marieken left him and hurried to the dairy, where she told Father Dacklin all she had heard.

“If the General returns he must not find any one here,” she finished. “The bombardment is over.”

The poor little frightened group in the cellar looked at her reproachfully, but Father Dacklin understood.

“Yes, Marieken is right; we must all go,” he said.

They climbed wearily up the ladder, and Marieken watched them trudge off down the road to their homes.

She took her mother gently back to the attic and then hurried to the dairy and covered the spring

door carefully with straw. Then she went back to the kitchen and tried to get dinner.

It was dark and raining hard when at last the clatter of hoofs, the thud, thud of men marching, and the shouted commands broke the stillness and heralded the return of the General.

Marieken stood still in the center of the kitchen and waited. She was afraid to go near any of the men for fear that she would ask the question uppermost in her mind—news of Lieutenant Teutch, or show by some word or look the glee she felt at their defeat.

At last Captain Hein came to her.

“The General wishes to see you,” he growled, and then as he saw the sleeping form of Hendrick his anger broke all bounds, and he came over to him and struck him furiously.

Marieken escaped through the green baize door. The General was sitting at the table.

“Good evening, Herr General,” she said respectfully, and waited.

The General looked up.

“Take some of my men with you,” he said curtly; “clear the cellar of all the wine casks and provisions. Now that the town hall is blown up we must use the cellar to keep those English swine in, until we can get rid of them in the morning.”

Marieken turned to go, and the General called after her.

“If you try any nonsense with those men it will go hard with you, do you understand?”

Marieken looked at him.

“Zandre is now a German village, Herr General. I will not forget that I serve Germans,” she forced herself to say, though the words stuck in her throat.

The General smiled. “That is right, Fräulein; you are a sensible girl. After that is done, how about a little supper?”

Marieken nodded. She could not trust herself to speak.

With Fritz and some of the other men she set to work cleaning the cellar, and then stood aside and watched Captain Hein drive the English soldiers down the ladder. Some of them he kicked,

others he contented himself with hurling insults at.

Marieken's cheeks flushed with rage as she looked at the tired, muddy handful of men; there were not more than a dozen of them, and several were badly wounded, but she clenched her hands and did not protest by so much as a glance at Captain Hein.

She sighed with relief as he shut the door after the last had disappeared, and she saw that the guard was to watch from the kitchen and not from inside of the cellar.

She was careful to prepare an extra delicious meal for dinner, and served the richest of wine with it.

There was no difference in her manner than on former nights, except that she stayed a little longer in the dining-room than usual.

But she heard no news of Lieutenant Teutch; his place at the table was ignored with the rest of the empty chairs.

After the onion soup and a glass of red wine, the General resumed some of his usual jocularities.

“Have you heard what we did to your Allies?” he asked, chuckling. “Such a fine lot of simpletons they are; easy work for a few Germans to handle. Do you congratulate us, little Fräulein, on the outcome of the day?”

Marieken answered, innocently. “With all my heart, Herr General.” Hendrick’s account did not tally with the General’s, and she was inclined to believe the former. Her congratulations were truly from her heart.

Toward the end of the meal a messenger arrived from the telegraph station with a message for the General.

Marieken busied herself with the dishes and stayed to hear its contents.

The General read it and turned scowling to Captain Hein.

“We do not march farther on to-morrow; we stay here and wait for word from General Markert.”

The Captain swore.

“What are we going to do with those English swine in the cellar?” he demanded. “We can’t

send them on to the prison camp without a heavy escort, and now if we are to stay?—”

The General was silent for a moment.

“How many are there?” he demanded.

“About a dozen.”

“Are they wounded?”

“Only a few.”

“Hum.” There was a long silence. Marieken’s heart beat so hard that she was afraid the men would hear, but her hand was steady as she refilled the Captain’s glass.

The General looked up suddenly.

“March them out of the town to-morrow morning early, and shoot them,” he ordered curtly. “We can’t be bothered with them here, and we’ve no men to spare to send them on.”

The officers nodded indifferently, and fell to eating again.

Marieken stole softly from the room.

Her brain was reeling and the room danced before her eyes. She sat down on a chair and gripped the end of the table. Hans looked up from his place by the cellar door.

“Tired, eh, Fräulein?”

Marieken nodded.

“Well, so am I, this war is a long time ending,” he added with a deep sigh.

Marieken looked at him for a full minute before she got up. Then,

“Want some hot soup?” she asked. “There’s some here in the tureen.”

Hans took the plate greedily, and Marieken cut him a generous piece of bread.

“Have you had your dinner, or must you wait until the guard changes?” she asked carelessly.

“Not a bite,” Hans growled, “and I am not relieved until nine o’clock.”

He gnawed hungrily at the bread.

“Quite a difference this, between the slops they call soup at the soup kitchen,” he growled. “The officers have things their own way and we who fight,—” he shrugged his shoulders and returned to his soup.

Marieken nodded sympathetically and began to wash the dishes.



CHAPTER IX

MARIEKEN TO THE RESCUE

“**D**O you have to do all those dishes every night?”

Hans's voice interrupted the clatter of the china, as her trembling fingers rattled them in the big copper dish pan.

“No, not always; Fritz helps me sometimes, and some of the others, but they're all pretty tired to-night and I don't want to ask them. I'll be through soon.”

Hans grunted his disapproval, but it was not sufficiently strong to make him offer personal assistance.

Marieken finished the drying up in silence and put the things away on the shelves. She was thinking hard as she worked. She knew the task ahead of her, but how to accomplish it was still unsolved when she was ready to climb up the ladder and go to bed.

“Good night,” Hans said sleepily as she took up the candle.

“Good night,” Marieken replied, and then she suddenly remembered the General’s tray.

“What was I thinking of to forget,” she said aloud, and came back into the room.

Hans saw her prepare the tray with hungry eyes.

“Do you like the Herr General?” he demanded. Marieken shrugged her shoulders.

“He is very kind to me,” she said wearily.

The tray was ready and she picked it up.

The General was in his room when she knocked.

He called, “Come in,” none too gently, but his tone changed as he saw the tray.

“Ha, our little Fräulein never forgets,” he said condescendingly.

Marieken laughed.

“I almost forgot to-night, Herr General,” she said. “I was so tired and sleepy. I think I was frightened to-day by the guns, and then, too, I have been so busy cleaning house.”

The General looked at her intently.

“You are a very good worker for a child,” he said thoughtfully, “very good—now go to bed and sleep. I must have my breakfast on time, remember.”

“Thank you, Herr General.” Marieken did not have to pretend tiredness, but instead of trying to hide it she exaggerated it now. She yawned several times before she finally left the room.

When she returned to the kitchen she found that Hans had left and a new guard had taken his place. He was a thin pale man with watery blue eyes, and a scared expression. He was warming his hands at the stove.

Marieken looked at him inquiringly.

“Hello,” she said cheerfully, “are you the new guard?”

The man looked up and nodded. His clothes were muddy and he looked cold.

Marieken went into the pantry and brought out some food, then she purposely left the door open. Most of the wine from the cellar had been put in that pantry.

The man took the food ungraciously and sat down before the cellar door.

Marieken picked up her candle and went up to the attic, but she did not go to bed. The crooked hollow in her mother's arm tempted her sorely, but she knew that if she once closed her eyes she would sleep until the morning, and the morning would be too late.

She sat down on the floor by the warm chimney place and tried to think. The only way from the attic to the dairy was through the kitchen, and that meant passing the guard.

"If he only drinks some of that wine," she whispered to herself, "and goes to sleep." But in her heart she knew that it was not wise to count on anything so simple.

The sounds from the barn and about the house grew less, and the time passed. The men were sleepy, she knew, and would turn in early.

She went over to the tiny window and looked out. It was a dreary night, and the few lights in the village were dimmed by the misty rain that

was falling. She opened the window and leaned out, a sudden hope taking possession of her.

The ground seemed a long way below her but she did not at once give up her new idea.

In reality the attic, being directly over the kitchen, was not many feet from the ground, but it was far enough to make jumping dangerous.

As she looked, a sentry on his rounds passed just beneath her, and she was able to gage the distance.

"It's my only chance," she said desperately, "and Josef used to climb down from the loft in the stable." She shut her eyes and made herself remember how she had watched her small cousin crawl down the side of the barn by clinging to the rough stones that jutted out.

The memory gave her confidence, and she took off her sabots and tied them carefully around her neck, then she waited until the sentry was far off down the road, and all the sounds from the barn had stopped.

She was desperately frightened and her hands

were ice cold, but she did not even consider turning back.

Very cautiously she slipped out, feet first, and let herself down slowly until she was hanging on by her hands; the sill as her only support. She felt around with one foot, but at first the rough wall felt as smooth as glass, then she touched something sharp that felt like a ledge, she wriggled a little farther toward it, and to her joy realized that she was touching the top of the pantry window. It was boarded up from the inside to keep out the light and she had forgotten that it was there.

The coping was quite broad and with little effort she climbed down to the sill and jumped lightly to the ground. It was soft, and the mud gave gently under her feet. She put on her sabots and stole softly to the dairy; she paused at the door to make sure that no one had seen her and then swiftly opened it and went inside.

The two cows paid no attention to her as she hunted for the ring on the floor. It was hard to find in the dark, but at last she felt it and

pulled up the door. Once in the dairy cellar she took care to close it again before lighting her candle. The tunnel seemed smaller than ever, and the air felt cold; for a minute she shivered.

Not all of her splendid courage could keep her from being afraid of the dark.

She gave herself a little shake, blew out the candle, and squirmed into the tunnel. She went as fast as it was possible to go, and it was not long before she felt the wooden side of the wine cask at the other end. She tried to push it, but it would not move. She was going to give up in despair when a voice that seemed as if it were right in her ear spoke.

“Bli’ me, but there’s a big rat somewhere about,” it said, but of course Marieken could not understand. She tapped gently on the barrel and spoke in French.

“Please, sir, push this away,” she begged.

A muffled exclamation broke from the man on the other side, and she heard more talking.

“That’s a girl, or I’ll eat my hat.”

“Could it be a spook, do you suppose?”

“Naw, you’re dreaming.”

She waited impatiently and then rapped harder.

“It is I, Marieken,” she said. “Please, please push this away.”

“There hit goes again, right in me neck this time.”

“Hit’s back of that barrel; let’s ’ave a look.”

Marieken felt the barrel move and as soon as there was a small opening she squirmed through. It was inky black in the cellar, not even the glow of a cigarette end pierced the darkness. It was a strange and uncanny pause before she found her candle and matches in her pocket and made a light.

In the uncertain flame the English Tommies stood around and looked at their guest in wonder and surprise.

“Hit’s a girl, a little girl, blast me if it hain’t,” a big bewildered-looking fellow said, breaking the dazed silence.

“What’s up, little one?” another voice inquired. Marieken shook her head.

“*Parlez-vous, Francais?*” she asked eagerly.

A little man with a bald head nodded.

“That means, ‘Do you speak French,’ ” he said proudly. “Can any of you speak it?” he inquired.

“No,” came a disappointed chorus.

Marieken looked from one to the other in perplexity, she had expected to find them all either crying or praying, and they were laughing. She saw that the only way to make them understand was to use the sign language.

She pointed to the tunnel, and then to her mouth, and pretended to eat.

The effect was instantaneous. The men nodded eagerly, so she motioned them to follow.

At first they seemed to agree, but a big red-headed Irish man pointed to a limp mass of khaki in one corner and they hesitated.

Marieken took the candle and went over to see what it was. A man with imploring, dark-brown eyes, was groaning pitifully.

She looked from him to the others. It seemed hopeless to try and make them understand.

At last she put the candle down on the top of an empty barrel and took the red-haired man by

the hand. She led him around to the other end of the cellar and pointed to the ladder. He shook his head and laughed, and they returned to the rest. The time was slipping away, and she knew she must explain their danger to them somehow. A half dry spot of dirt by the barrel gave her an inspiration. She began to draw pictures with her first finger. She drew a plan of the cellar first, then pointed to the tunnel. It was like a game and the men crowded eagerly around to watch. They understood at once. She drew the tunnel and then the dairy cellar, with a ladder beside it, then to explain that one was unguarded she drew a man by the inn cellar and shook her head as she pointed to the dairy ladder.

The men understood.

“She wants us to get away, bless ’er little ’eart,” one man said excitedly, but the red-headed man, whose name was Patsy, said,

“Hush up, she drawin’ some more.”

Marieken drew a picture of a sun with its rays sticking out on all sides, and looked anxiously to see if they understood. Several nods assured

her and she pointed again to the spindly legs of the guard, traced his way down to the cellar, pointed to all the men and traced the way back to the ground; drew a picture of a house and a tree and then very dramatically pushed the red-headed Patsy against the wall and pretended to shoot him.

“ ‘Oly smoke! Do you think she means Fritz is going to just gently kill us?’ ”

“She does, me son, she does, and phwy not; ’twill be too much trouble to take us to a prison camp, that’s how they’ve figured it out, and who’d be the wiser.” Patsy regarded the drawing again, he was wordless for once in his voluble life.

The rest of the men looked at each other uneasily. At last one named “Alf” said slowly,

“Looks as if she had a bit of inside dope; guess we better follow ’er lead.”

Patsy nodded and waved her ceremoniously to the tunnel.

Marieken went back to the wounded soldier and pointed to him. Two of the men lifted him gently between them.

Then she blew out the candle and led the way

through the tunnel. When they were all safe in the little dairy cellar, and she had made the sick man as comfortable as possible in the straw, she took down a ham that was hanging in one corner under a shelf of wine bottles, and gave it to Patsy, then she pointed to the ladder, but something was worrying the Irishman. He looked at Marieken and then at the tunnel.

“Wait for me a minute all of yez,” he directed, and plunged back into it, the candle and matches in one of his huge hands.

The rest waited impatiently in the darkness. They heard queer scraping noises and the soft pad, pad that a shovel makes against the mud.

He was back in a short time, grinning.

“It’s a foine job I made of that,” he announced. “No one with any brains, and much less a stupid Fritz would ever think there was a tunnel there, and begad, there isn’t one, for I’ve closed up that end in back of the barrel.”

He tried to show Marieken by doing the same thing at the opening, and she nodded her head excitedly and thanked him.

Then she put her finger on her lips for silence, blew out the candle once more, and went softly up the ladder.

She opened the door cautiously and peeked out. There was not a sound to break the stillness. Going back softly, she beckoned the men to come.

She stood aside as they crept past her in single file. Patsy was the last to leave. The rest had tried in their clumsy way to show her their appreciation by a nod of their heads or by squeezing her hand, but the gallant Irishman lifted her high in his arms and kissed her tenderly. There was a suspicion of dampness as his eyelashes brushed her thin little cheek.

“Good-by, me little darlint, and God bless ye. If I live or die this night, I’ll niver forget ye.”

Marieken did not understand what he said, but something of the spirit of his words touched her, and she gave him a grateful hug.

She pointed toward the direction that she had taken the night before.

The men nodded confidently, and were gone.

CHAPTER X

THE ENGLISH PRISONERS ESCAPE

MARIEKEN watched their shadowy forms until they were lost in the darkness, and tried hard to pierce the gloom for a last glimpse of them. She was afraid, deathly afraid, now that her task was accomplished and they were free.

She waited for a long time, but nothing interrupted the steady rumble of the guns, then she remembered the wounded man, and stole quietly back to the cellar again.

She did what she could for him. When he had eaten a little bread and sipped a little wine, she cradled his head in her lap and stroked his forehead until he was asleep. She dozed for a little herself, to awake with a frightened start. In her thankfulness over the prisoners' escape she forgot her own danger.

The soldier was still sleeping quietly, and she moved his head gently to the straw and got up.

When she opened the trap-door she was almost afraid to look for she had no idea how long she had been dozing, but a pale gray streak across the sky told her that it was just dawn, and she sat down between the cows and tried to think.

She had to get back to her attic somehow, and in the cold light of dawn her chances seemed very few. She had purposely neglected to bar the kitchen door, but even if she got into the kitchen she could not escape passing the guard to reach her ladder. As she thought about it she heard a noise in the yard; she peered cautiously out of the window and recognized the guard of the night before. He was standing in the courtyard, staring dazedly about him. She waited anxiously and her heart almost stopped beating as she saw him make his unsteady way toward the barn. He knocked on the door, and after a few minutes it opened and he stumbled inside.

Marieken darted across the court and into the kitchen. Just as she had one foot on the bottom

rung of the ladder the green baize door across the room opened and she was face to face with Captain Hein.

“What’s the meaning of all this noise, I want to know,” he demanded gruffly.

Marieken felt the muscles of her throat contract and her head swim. The end she had dreaded had come, but instead of feeling frightened she was angry. She turned to the Captain and spoke recklessly.

“Don’t ask *me* what the trouble is; all night I have been kept awake by the noises down here. At last I got dressed and came down to see, and now I ask you, look at that table! Look at that over-turned chair and the door wide open.” Captain Hein tried to interrupt but she scolded on.

“Of course, the cold air puts my fire out, and now the Herr General and you will be angry because the rooms are chilly, but that is as nothing compared to all that wine; it is the best we had, and it is nearly all gone,” she stopped.

“Who was on guard?” Captain Hein demanded.

“How do I now,” Marieken retorted. “I didn’t look at him last night, except to put some food out for him, and this—this—” she pointed to the table cluttered with the empty bottles, and spoke in rapid Flemish—“this is the way the ungrateful fellow treats me.”

“Oh, hold your tongue, you chattering magpie, and go back to your room,” Captain Hein growled angrily.

Marieken turned to him furiously, “And who will clean all this away and rebuild the fire,” she demanded. “The Herr General wants his breakfast early.”

“Well, then, make the fire, but don’t speak again,” the Captain commanded, and went out to the barn.

Marieken opened the door of the stove. The fire was not out, but she made haste to pile more fuel on it and then began collecting the bottles from the table.

The door opened and the Captain returned, dragging the very sleepy guard and followed by Fritz and some of the other men.

He began questioning him angrily but he received only inane babbling in reply.

After a little he gave it up and sent the man off under arrest and turned to Marieken.

“Get me something to eat,” he commanded, and sat down in a chair by the table.

Marieken made him coffee and poached him some eggs, then she went to the dairy to milk one of the cows, so that he could have a jug of milk. She hurried back with her pitcher foaming, but not before she had carefully moved the butter churn directly over the telltale ring in the floor and saw to her satisfaction that the rain had obliterated all the footprints about the door.

Captain Hein ate his meal in silence, and Marieken waited—waited, with her heart throbbing and her eyes fastened on the green baize door, for the minute to come when the escape of the prisoners would be discovered.

At last Lieutenant Shultz came into the kitchen. He was fully dressed and armed. He sat down beside Captain Hein, and Marieken, without being

told, brought him his breakfast. He looked tired and unhappy. Captain Hein noticed it.

“What’s the matter,” he sneered. “Don’t you relish your little job.”

“No, I don’t,” Lieutenant Shultz replied bluntly.

The Captain laughed.

“Tender feelings for our English cousins, eh?” he inquired. “Better forget them until the war is over.”

The Lieutenant did not reply. He finished his coffee hurriedly and went out to the barn and gave some orders. Six of the men trooped in and Fritz opened the cellar door. Captain Hein leaned back in his chair in smiling anticipation.

Marieken had to clinch her hands tight to keep from crying out. It seemed an eternity before the horrified face of Fritz appeared again at the door and reported in a trembling voice,

“The prisoners are not there, sir; the cellar is empty.”

Captain Hein bounded from his chair.

“What are you saying,” he demanded.

Fritz tried to explain.

After that events seemed to be all jumbled together in Marieken's brain.

She had a long fifteen minutes of anguish as the men went down to the cellar and made a thorough search, but Patsy had done his work well, and with a sigh that was almost a cry she heard Lieutenant Shultz say, "They must have come this way; there's no other opening," and Captain Hein snarled,

"They left when the sentry was asleep, or—" turning threateningly to Marieken—"the little spitfire let them out. We will look into it thoroughly."

He sent out a scouting party to search the fields and question the outpost sentries. Marieken had given the General his breakfast before they returned, and she heard them report with a beating heart that none of the sentries had seen or heard anything in the night." She stood behind the General's chair when Captain Hein reported the escape and trembled as he pounded the table with his fists and ordered the arrest of

all the sentries. He did not even look at her, except when Captain Hein asked her meaningly if she would confirm his statement about the condition of the kitchen. He laid stress on the fact that she was up early, but the General did not seem to consider it important. He asked her a few questions which she answered gravely.

As soon as she could, she went back to the kitchen and tried hard to steady herself, but the reaction was too strong. It seemed inevitable that she would be found out. She knew what to expect from Captain Hein if he could implicate her in the escape; he would go out of his way to do it. All her wits seemed to desert her and she came very near bursting into tears. In fact, a dry choking sob rose to her lips and would have surely broken through, had not a sudden noise of yelling and shouting in the road sent her hurrying to the window.

CHAPTER XI

THE WOUNDED SOLDIER

A CROWD of soldiers surrounded a dispatch rider who was trying to make his way to the Inn. Marieken looked at him wearily. Was he bringing news of the recapture of the prisoners? Her heart sank as the possibility occurred to her. The men were questioning him excitedly, and she went to the front of the house the better to hear what was said.

When he reached the Inn he threw himself from his horse and dashed past her and into the dining-room. The General was still at the table. The messenger saluted hurriedly; he was covered with mud and wet through from the rain; his voice was weak.

“Herr General, the enemy have captured the bridge and we have retreated to the woods and fortified our positions. My orders are to tell you to bring as many men as you can at once; the

enemy is keeping up their fire and our losses are great. General Markert's orders, sir." He saluted again and then dropped wearily into a chair and started devouring a crust of bread that was left on one of the plates.

The General hardly noticed him beyond an impatient nod of his head. He got up and went outside.

The same scene of hurried preparations that had followed the last alarm was repeated.

Men and horses ran to obey the shouted commands of the officers.

Marieken watched one group just in front of the Inn. It was a detachment under Captain Hein. The men were sullen and angry at having to go into action so soon again, and some of them growled under their breaths.

Hendrick was in the front ranks. The ugly scar on his cheek and the consesuent loss of blood from it made him dizzy, and he would have fallen had he not put out his hand to steady himself. Unfortunately for him the nearest thing in reach happened to be the Captain's shoulder. At the

touch of his grasp Captain Hein turned on him angrily and hit him with the broad side of his sword.

The rest of the men protested angrily; there was an ugly expression in their eyes.

Hendrick stumbled and fell heavily to the ground. Marieken drew a sharp breath as she watched, for the instant that Captain Hein turned his back Hendrick pointed his gun and fired; the Captain fell forward on his face. Lieutenant Schultz heard the shot and hurried to the scene.

The men pointed tremblingly to Hendrick, and the Lieutenant pulled out his revolver, but it was not necessary; a tiny stream of blood ran from the corner of his mouth and stained the cobblestones of the road a dull red. Hendrick was beyond punishment.

Marieken, as she watched, felt a warm glow of relief in her heart. Captain Hein was the only one who had suspected her, and now she no longer needed to fear him. He was nothing but a hideous lump doubled up in a grotesque position beside the man who had shot him.

She shed a sincere tear for Hendrick; he had always been so young and so much kinder than the others. She was glad, for his sake, that he was dead and away from all the misery of again going to face the guns.

The incident, for it was no more than that in the eyes of most of the men, caused a little delay. The bodies were removed and laid side by side in an empty cottage to await burial, and then the preparations continued.

Marieken stayed at her place by the window until the last detachment was well down the road, then she slipped out of the house and hurried to Father Dacklin's cottage.

She had not forgotten the wounded Englishman in the dairy cellar, but she had not dared go to him.

The Curé was up in the attic of the house, where he had hidden the Burgomaster, and Marieken had to rap several times before he came down to open the door.

When he saw her, he opened his arms wide and she tumbled into them and sobbed her fear and

weariness away. He did not ask any questions, but stroked her head gently and waited until she was quiet, then he led her upstairs and she told her story while he and the Burgomaster listened in wide-eyed wonder.

“I do not know just what is the matter with the poor man in the cellar,” she finished; “that is why I have come to you. There is no one left at the Inn and it will be quite safe for you to go to him.”

The Curé nodded and got up at once. He was not only a minister of the church, but something of a doctor as well. All Zandre went to him in their illnesses of body as well as soul, so it was not surprising that he was able to relieve the rack-ing pains that were making the poor Englishman roll and moan on his straw bed.

The man spoke a little French, and he apologized to Marieken for not having been able to help her the night before. Then he asked news of his comrades. Marieken patted his hand and told him that they were safe within the English lines and promised that she would take care of him

until he was well enough to follow them, or until the English came.

Father Dacklin sent her back to the Inn for water and clean clothes, and when she returned with them he said:

“Now, my child, you are tired out and need a rest. Go up to your room and go to bed. I will take care of everything for you.”

“Will you call me at once, mon Père, if the Germans return?” she inquired.

“I will, and in time, so that they will not find you napping. Now go along.”

Marieken was only too glad to obey. She did not even bother to take off her heavy sabots, but nestled down beside her mother and was asleep almost before her head touched the pillow.

The Germans did not return that night nor the next, and though the guns thundered all the time and some of the shells fell over the village, a sense of relief settled over the people. Now and again a single messenger would ride down the main road to the camp beyond, but the Inn was left in peace.

Sophie came over and took care of Marieken; she brought her food up to the attic, and for a whole day she would not let her even sit up. She would have kept her there longer, but Marieken, her mind and body refreshed, insisted upon resuming her old place.

“Very well, then, get up,” Sophie said in despair, “but you will surely die.”

Marieken laughed and drew on the sabots that Sophie had taken off. “I will not die for a long time,” she said gayly; “there is too much to do. The Germans will come back and perhaps bring more prisoners. If they do,”—she shrugged her shoulders—“Marieken must be there to free them.”

“Oh, but that was an exciting time,” she continued. “Look, Sophieken. I went to bed quietly as usual, and I came downstairs next morning, and in the meanwhile all the laughing English soldiers have disappeared. I am a magician.” She laughed happily at her own jest, and kissed her mother warmly.

“Ha, little Mother, the next thing I will do with

my magic is to find your Henri for you." Madame De Bruin nodded her head and smiled.

"Where are you going now?" Sophie asked as Marieken started down the ladder.

"To the dairy to see my soldier boy. How is he?"

"Oh, much better, Monsieur Le Curé is with him, and to-day the Burgomaster and Papa Jacques carried him up the stairs for a little air."

Marieken waited until she was all the way down the ladder and standing in the kitchen floor, and then she stamped her foot with all the old energy.

"It is a good thing I am up," she said indignantly. "The idea of doing anything so foolish. Do you want one of these snooping Germans to see and report to the General? A nice state of affairs that would be, my soldier stood up against a wall and shot, and the rest of us—" she stopped and let the astonished Sophie picture the fate that lay in store for them. Then she walked resolutely to the dairy, and to add to her fears she found the trap door wide open. She went down the ladder and closed it carefully behind her.

The Burgomaster was playing chess with the wounded soldier. They both looked up inquiringly as their light was cut off.

Marieken explained respectfully, for though she was the heroine of the village she remembered that it is not the proper thing to talk to your Burgomaster in quite the same tone that you would use to your cousin's best friend.

But although she was respectful she was firm, and the Burgomaster agreed with her.

"You are right, dear child," he said humbly. "We were too rash, but the blessed sight of Zandre without those German pigs to make it hateful with their swaggering and boasting has made us careless. I will leave my good friend to your care now, and return to Monsieur Le Curé."

"Will you come again to-morrow?" the Englishman inquired wistfully.

"Yes, without a doubt, unless—" there was no need to finish the sentence. The old gentleman climbed laboriously up the ladder and was very careful to close the trap-door after him.

Marieken had lighted a candle before he left. Now by the sturdy yellow flame she looked at the soldier for a long time in silence.

“You are better, Monsieur,” she said.

“I’m much better,” the Englishman agreed hastily. “In a day or two I’ll be going. You’ve been awfully good to me, kid,” he finished in his awkward French.

“Say, tell me,” he continued, “how did you get along with the other boys? Make ’em understand, I mean. If I’d only been awake I could have helped.”

Marieken had almost forgotten the signs she had drawn so earnestly on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Now the memory of it made her laugh heartily. She sprang up, took a handful of dirt from the tunnel, sprinkled it on the floor, and drew the same pictures to amuse her patient.

He chuckled delightedly, and they fell to conversing in this very primitive fashion.

“I’ll bet this tickled Patsy,” he said a little later.

Marieken looked puzzled.

“Patsy,” she said slowly, and then her brow cleared.

“I know, the nice big man with—” she pointed to her hair, and to the flame of the candle.

Then they both laughed. They laughed so hard in fact that they did not hear the hurried rapping on the floor above their heads.

CHAPTER XII

JEANNEKEN RETURNS

WHEN Marieken did hear it she stopped abruptly and put her hand over her companion's mouth.

She ran hurriedly up the ladder. Father Dacklin had the door open.

"They are coming back," he said excitedly.

"They are at the post office now."

Marieken only stopped to assure the Englishman that she would steal in to see him as soon as she could and hurried to the house. All the childish, merry expression left her face, and she bent her shoulders as if to receive again the tiresome burdens.

But the return of the Germans on this occasion was not as bad as it had been. There were fewer of them, and none of the privates were quartered at the Inn barn. They were sent off down the

road to the barracks at the far end of the village.

There were several new officers, but they were all quiet, tired-looking men, and even the General forgot to jest with Marieken, or to notice the scanty food that she served for dinner.

“They look like men with a great deal to think about,” she said as she slipped into the cellar to say good night to the soldier.

“Sounds as if they were getting a bit fed up,” he said hopefully, but Marieken did not understand, and he went on in French. “Be sure and keep your ears and eyes opened,” he advised; “if you hear anything like the plans for an attack let me know; I’ll be able to get out of here ’most any time now, and we can start a little special messenger route of our own.”

Marieken nodded and left him.

She was careful to take the usual tray to the General’s room, and while she was there she looked hard at his table, but it was cluttered with maps and papers and she could make nothing out of them.

The next morning she was busily washing the

dishes when old Jacques appeared suddenly at the kitchen door and beckoned to her.

“What is it?” she whispered, keeping an eye on the green baize door.

“Come with me, quick. Jeanneken is at our house; she came in the middle of the night, and Sophie is taking care of her.”

“Jeanneken! Is she ill?” Marieken exclaimed. Jacques shook his head.

“No, not ill, nothing but tired and frightened. She has been in another attack; the whole village was bombarded and she barely escaped.”

“Is Josef with her?” Marieken asked.

“No, she lost him somewhere, but she is not afraid for him, because— Oh, I forget why; she talks so much, I can’t remember. Will you come?”

“Yes, in a minute; you go back without me,” Marieken directed, and old Jacques shuffled off.

Marieken followed as soon as she finished washing the dishes.

She found her cousin—just as weeks before she had found Sophie—lying in the straw in old

Jacques' attic; but there was one difference. Sophie's hair had turned gray and deep wrinkles had made her look like an old woman, but Jeanneken was more beautiful than ever.

Her soft hair, the color of shining flax, was still bound around her head in the heavy braid that Marieken remembered, and her eyes, through their mist of tears, were as blue and sparkling with life as they had ever been on any feast day. She was a little thinner, perhaps, and her face had taken on the look of a woman in place of the girl, but the change added to her beauty.

Marieken, at sight of her, took her in her arms and laughed and cried with joy.

"Jeanneken! Jeanneken! how good it is to see you again. I was so afraid you would never come back."

Jeanneken looked at her little cousin tenderly. She had heard from Jacques the story of her courage, and the tale had lost nothing in the telling.

"I should never have gone," she said sadly, "to leave you alone; it was cowardly of me."

But Marieken would not listen to such talk, and after a few minutes of coaxing she finally made her speak of her adventures.

Little Albert climbed up in her lap as she began, and the rest sat in silence.

“There is little enough to tell,” Jeanneken began. “Sophie has told you we left one town and traveled to another, only to wake up in the night and hear the guns at our front door, and then off again on the road. It was on a sudden trip like that that I lost Josef. We met some of our soldiers and he ran off to talk to them. We were stopping for lunch on the roadway. I did not miss him at once, and when I did he was gone. I stayed behind to hunt for him, but I could not find him, and the rest went on without me. I was half frantic.”

Marieken interrupted.

“Don’t worry about Josef,” she laughed; “if he saw the soldiers he followed them; I know his trick, and the fairy tales he tells; he is now safe in some camp, rest assured—the little mischief. And our soldiers will take good care of him.”

Jeanneken nodded happily and the cloud left her face.

“Go on,” Sophie prompted.

“Oh, what is the use,” she sighed. “We traveled for weeks, one day was like another, one town was like the next, everywhere the people in France were alike, all good to us. I have forgotten the name of the villages,” she hesitated; “all, that is, except one.”

Marieken looked at her and pointed her finger as she had done so many times when they were children.

“Jeanneken, you have a secret,” she accused. “Tell us this instant.”

Her cousin laughed and blushed, and then a sad, frightened expression crossed her face.

“It was at Noens,” she said softly. “I reached there tired to death. I had been lost all day after Josef had gone off with the soldiers. There were English in the town; soldiers, oh, so many of them. I went from one house to another, but there was no room for me. Just as I was almost fainting at the

last house, and begging the old woman to take me in, a big Englishman came into the room and saw me. He asked me what we were talking about. Oh, but his French was funny; I had to laugh."

"That was impolite," old Jacques interrupted. "Your English would be funnier."

Jeanneken agreed humbly. "You are right, Papa Jacques, but he did not mind; he made the old woman take me in, and when night came he gave me his bed. All the next day he was busy. I asked the old woman what his name was and she told me it was Tommy Atkins, so when he came in I called him that. How he did laugh, and so did the man with him. It was raining hard that day, and they had to stay inside. I shooed the old woman—such a stingy old thing that she was—away and cooked their dinner for them. We all ate together, such a lark as we had. You'd never guess with the cannons roaring so near us that night. I found all those nice men's shoes and brushed them while they slept, and I shined up their buttons and brushed their coats."

“Giving an extra lick to Monsieur Tommy Atkins, I don’t doubt,”—old Jacques chuckled at his own humor.

“Well, perhaps,” Jeanneken admitted. “On the next day the guns grew louder and louder. Tommy Atkins told me not to be afraid, that he would take care of me, and he did. In the night the whole village seemed to be in flames, all of a sudden. The people screamed, and, oh, I don’t remember the little things, only that when our house was struck and I felt it was all piled on top of me, he came and pulled me out and carried me away for miles down a road. When we were safe he put me down and said he must go back, and I think that is all.”

Marieken shook her finger again. “You are stopping before you come to the secret,” she said solemnly, “and that’s not fair.”

Jeanneken blushed a little and pretended to be surprised, but she would not go on. After a while, when Sophie and Jacques went downstairs, she pulled her little cousin to her.

“Marieken! Marieken! I love that big

Tommy Atkins," she whispered, "and he loves me. He told me so, and he promised to find me after the war."

"But he doesn't even know your name, does he?" her practical little cousin inquired.

"No, but he will find me just the same," Jeanneken replied with smiling confidence.

CHAPTER XIII

TOMMY ATKINS

FOR the next few days Marieken went about her work singing. She spent as much of her time as it was safe with Jeanneken and her English soldier.

The Curé and the Burgomaster had been told of Jeanneken's return, and they thought it best for her to remain hidden in old Jacques' attic. If she answered to the German's weekly roll call the question of how she managed to slip unseen into the village might lead to strengthening the guard, and Marieken, with an eye to the escape of her soldier, did not want that to happen.

If Jeanneken had had any of the fearless courage that characterized her small cousin, it might have been safe for her to come to the Inn, but she was a timid girl, and the old Curé feared the treatment she might receive at the hands of the German officers.

So Jeanneken rested in her attic and dreamed delightful dreams of her reunion with Private Tommy Atkins. Meanwhile, Marieken kept her ears open, and every night she reported to the soldier.

It was a week after the escape of the prisoners when something in the General's manner at dinner made her hurry through with the dishes and go down to the dairy cellar.

It had been a week of such rain and sleet that even the rumble of the big guns were forced to stop, and Nature asserted herself as mistress of the earth once more. But with the first hint of the sun the bombardment began again.

"Our spring drive," the Englishman announced as a shell burst near the village. He was comfortably smoking a cigarette that Marieken had pilaged for him from Lieutenant Shultz's collection, and the air of the cellar was blue.

Marieken waved away the cloud of smoke just in front of her face and nodded, then she settled herself comfortably in the straw. She was great friends with her soldier by now.

“Listen to me,” she commanded as he started to hum a little tune.

“I have something to tell you. The Herr General was very cheerful to-night. He pinched my cheek, noticed what he ate, and he and the rest of the officers drank a health to ‘our plan.’ ”

The soldier whistled.

“Guess they’ve got something up their sleeves, same as we have,” he laughed. “Could you hear any more?”

“No, but I will be very sure to listen,” Marieken replied.

“If it’s a plan, we’ve got to find out what,” he went on. “I could have left here days ago but it’s too good a chance to do a little spy work. There’s one thing sure, if we are still entrenched in Voorle the next objective will be Zandre, and that means most of the cottages will go. My hat!” he finished in English, “don’t I wish I were back and knew what was going on.”

Marieken nodded, though she did not understand, then she asked suddenly,

“Do you know a man in the English Army named Tommy Atkins?”

The soldier threw back his head and laughed heartily. “Only a couple of hundred,” he replied, and then a wistful expression crossed his face and he smoked for a few minutes in silence.

Marieken looked surprised.

“So many as that,” she said wonderingly. “Poor Jeanneken.” Then she added with a little laugh.

“Do you know you have never told me your name,” she said.

“Haven’t I? No, I guess I haven’t. Funny, isn’t it,” the soldier replied. “I got so used to your calling me Monsieur Le Soldat that I never thought. It’s Private George Hawkins, in his Majesty’s service. Yours to command,” he bowed.

Marieken said the name over to herself, putting a ridiculous French accent on it, and Private Hawkins had hard work to conceal his mirth.

“It’s a very nice name,” she said at last, po-

lately, "but I wish it were Tommy Atkins instead."

The next day dawned bright and clear, and the guns roared incessantly.

The General was away early, and Marieken spent most of her time in old Jacques' attic. The Curé was down in the cellar playing dominoes with Private Hawkins.

There was a touch of spring in the air, and, despite the guns, there were birds in the fields and woods.

Zandre was a sorry spectacle, and its tumbled-down cottages and muddy roads stood out pitifully in the cruel sunlight, but the inhabitants at the first feel of its warm rays shook off their gloomy despair and came out of their cottages to gather on the road in little groups to talk.

The German authorities noticed the change, and the postmaster, a taciturn man who wore thick lens glasses and always had bread crumbs in his bristly gray beard, reported to the General that night while he was eating his dinner.

Marieken listened to the interview from behind the green baize door, and hurried down to the cellar to tell Private Hawkins what she had heard.

“Oh, do listen! I have terrible news,” she exclaimed as she climbed down the ladder.

“The General has just ordered a house-to-house search for to-morrow. The postmaster saw some people he has never seen before, and he thinks they must be spies. What shall I do? My cousin is in hiding in old Jacques’ attic, and they will find her.”

“How old is she?” George inquired.

“Only eighteen, and oh, so beautiful; they will think, of course, she is a spy and perhaps kill her.”

“Steady,”—the soldier put his big hand on Marieken’s trembling shoulders. “You’re not going to lose your courage now, are you?”

Marieken stiffened.

“No, I am not, only tell me what to do. I can’t seem to think.”

“Why not bring her down here,” George suggested. “I’ll take care of her. They’re not likely to find us.”

Marieken nodded. “I had thought of that,” she said slowly, “but how can I get her here, she is so frightened?”

“Well, you’ll have to manage that somehow. Is it a very dark night?”

“Yes; it will rain, I think, to-morrow by the look of the clouds.”

“Good, then go and get her now. I’ll be waiting for you, ready to open the door.”

Marieken’s courage returned to her as she slipped into the darkness and made her way stealthily back of the barn in the direction of old Jacques’ house.

There was a cast-iron law in the village that no one should leave their cottages after eight o’clock at night. Several offenders had been caught on the road during the past months and severely punished, but Marieken was used to taking risks, and this one seemed small in comparison to the others.

She carefully avoided the main road and made a

wide detour, at last reaching old Jacques' cottage without being seen. There was no light inside. The authorities had requisitioned all the candles months before.

She tapped gently on the door, but got no response. She did not dare to make much of a noise, and after trying a couple of times more she gave it up and went around to the side.

At one little window wads of paper were carefully stuffed to keep out the cold. The glass had been broken long ago. It was an easy matter to tear out the paper and climb inside.

It was pitch dark, and Marieken tried to get her bearings. The cottage only boasted one room, and the ladder leading to the attic was not hard to find. She heard old Jacques breathing heavily on his pallet bed, and moved gently so as not to disturb him.

She woke Sophie gently when she reached the attic, and told her the news. Jeanneken awoke at the sound of Sophie's muffled exclamation.

"What is it?" she asked, sitting up.

Marieken explained.

“Hurry into your clothes and come,” she warned. “We haven’t a minute to spare.”

Her cousin looked at Sophie. “Oh, don’t worry about me. I will tell them Baby Albert is mine and that I have been back a long time,” Sophie said. “Come, I will help you dress.”

When she was ready Marieken led the way softly to the front door, and when she was sure no one was in sight they started.

They had one fright on the way, the yellow dog that Marieken had seen Lieutenant Teutch pat, on that memorable day of her discovery, came out of the cottage and barked lustily at them. Marieken pulled her cousin down into the mud beside her, and they waited.

No one came. The sentry was evidently used to the dog and probably thought he was after a rat.

Jeanneken trembled so for the rest of the trip that it was with a sigh of relief that Marieken pushed open the dairy door and they found themselves safe inside.

A whisper came from beneath the trap-door. Marieken answered it and helped pull it open.



“‘It’s you!’ they both exclaimed”

There was no light, and they had to feel their way.

When they were all in the little room, and the trap-door down, Private Hawkins lighted the candle and held it above his head.

It was only the end of a candle and the flame was very pale and fitful.

Marieken's mind was worrying over the necessity of taking another one from her rapidly diminishing store, and was not at all prepared for what followed.

Jeanneken and Private George Hawkins looked at each other for the fraction of a minute, then they both exclaimed excitedly, one in French and the other in English.

"It's you."

"My Tommy Atkins," said Jeanneken joyfully.

Private George Hawkins did not say anything, his long arm suddenly encircled Jeanneken and held her tight.

Marieken stared, stupefied at first, and then reached anxiously for the candle. It sputtered for a second and then went out.

CHAPTER XIV

A FULL STOMACH MAKES A SLEEPY HEAD

EXPLANATIONS followed in the dark.

George told how he had searched the road on which he had left Jeanneken, for three hours the next day, without finding any trace of her, and how his section had been moved almost at once to the front. His arm tightened around her when he spoke of his despair, and the terrible dreams that had tormented him while he lay wounded in the cellar.

Jeanneken was far too happy to talk sensibly. She babbled little foolish things and nestled her head on his shoulder.

Finally Marieken could stand it no longer; they had apparently forgotten her existence.

“Do stop your talking,” she commanded, exasperated, “and answer me some questions.” She turned to George.

“Why did you tell me your name was not Tommy Atkins?”

George laughed and explained that all English soldiers were Tommies, and that he had thought it so comical when Jeanneken believed that to be his own name that he had not corrected her.

Marieken did not think it was funny; she thought it was very silly.

“And it might have made you lose each other for always,” she declared.

“No, little cousin, that was not possible,” Jeanneken protested. “I told you he would find me; you laughed then, but I was right, wasn’t I?” she ended triumphantly.

They were all too much excited to sleep, and as the candle was out they sat in the dark and talked in whispers.

At the first streak of dawn Marieken stole back to the Inn. It was raining, as she predicted; a fine misty drizzle.

“Just the weather to go over the top,” George said wistfully as he peeked through the trap-door for a brief moment.

“See if you can’t find out the General’s plans to-day,” he said to Marieken.

She nodded, “I will. Hark, the guns sound nearer.”

She stood in the courtyard and listened.

A thud, thud of boots mingled with the rumble. She motioned George to shut the door and hurried around the house to see what it was.

“So early, Herr Postmaster?” she said, smiling to herself as she saw a squad of men marching down the road, with the postmaster at the head. She went into the house and watched the inspection from the front window. The men halted at every house, and whether it was occupied or not made a thorough search. It took a long time, and the General was eating his breakfast before they reached the Inn.

Marieken met them at the door.

“What do you want?” she demanded.

“House-to-house inspection, General’s orders,” the Postmaster said importantly. He had never led a body of men before and he was feeling the full dignity of his command.

Marieken shrugged her shoulders and stepped aside.

“Very well, come in.”

Five of the men entered; their heavy shoes made a clattering noise in the hall.

“Who is that?” The General’s voice demanded from the dining-room.

Marieken explained.

The General’s face grew purple with rage. He strode out to meet the smiling Postmaster.

“Pig, imbecile,” he roared. “What do you mean by letting your great clumsy brutes stumble in here?”

“The inspection, Herr General,” the postmaster stuttered.

“Inspection in my headquarters! What do you expect to find? Out with you this instant!”

“But, Herr General?” The light blue eyes behind the heavy lens looked wide with wonder.

“Not another word,” blustered the General, and Marieken had to hide her head in one of the curtains to keep from laughing at the woe-begone retreat of the frightened men. They walked

on tiptoe out of the house, their heads down, for all the world like a dog with his tail between his legs.

The General returned to the dining-room and continued his meal, and the discussion he was having with some of the officers.

Marieken listened shamelessly.

“I tell you it can’t fail,” the General said decidedly.

“But what if they won’t advance that far?” Lieutenant Schultz inquired.

“Bah, of course they will; give an Englishman rope and he will hang himself,” the General sneered, “or in other words give them an open space and they will advance as far as they can without regard to their objective.”

“Fräulein, more coffee,” he called suddenly, breaking off in the middle of his narrative.

Marieken stamped her foot in disappointed rage as she left the door and went to the stove, but what she heard, as she poured the steaming coffee into the General’s cup, made her heart turn over.

“The plans, map and directions,” he said casually, “I have with me. It is not necessary for me to tell you the details of the campaign as yet, but I am glad to say that if we carry out our intentions, and I see no reason why we should not, the war will be over in a month, or less. That is,”—he stroked his goatee reflectively—“as far as General Markert’s and my part are concerned.” (General Von Dulk was only a lieutenant-general, but he liked to consider himself on an equal footing with the all-powerful General Markert, when he was not in the latter’s company.)

Marieken repeated the conversation to George and Jeanneken later in the morning, but she omitted to tell them where it was that the General kept the all-important paper. Common sense and a fine disregard for the caution of grown-ups made her keep it a secret.

“I will see if I can find it to-night when I take up his tray,” she said. “You be ready to leave at midnight.”

There was a long minute of silence as she finished. George looked hard at Jeanneken, but if

he expected her to cry or protest he was disappointed.

“You must have a bundle of food,” she said quite calmly, breaking the silence, “and a safe place to hide the map.”

George looked at her admiringly. “I say! I wish you could understand English,” he said earnestly, “then I could tell you honestly how fine I think you are.”

Jeanneken patted his curly head, much as she would have patted a child's, and began speaking rapidly to her cousin, in Flemish.

“It is not safe for him to go in that uniform,” she said. “He could never get past the sentries.”

“But what else can he wear?” Marieken asked.

“A suit of old Jacques’; you go to Sophie and get it; we will make him look like an old man, and then he will be quite safe.”

Jeanneken pushed her cousin toward the ladder and turned to explain to George.

Marieken got the clothes from Sophie, though it was necessary to make old Jacques take part of them off, and returned to the dairy.

The General was away most of the day, and the Curé came to see George. He was astonished to find Jeanneken there, but when he heard the story of Tommy Atkins he laughed merrily, and then very gravely gave them his blessing.

Marieken left them discussing the details of the flight, and went up to sit beside her mother and think. The sounds of the guns made Madame De Bruin restless, and now and again a look of understanding would come into her eyes.

Marieken knew she had to face a danger greater than any she had faced before, for the General had told his officers that he kept the precious map under his pillow when he slept, and it was from there that she had to get it.

When, for the first time, she realized what would happen to her and to them all, when the General woke up the next morning and found it missing, she almost gave up, but a plan, only half formed so far, in the back of her brain, gave her courage.

She cooked an enormous dinner that night and noticed with relief that the General looked both

hungry and sleepy, as he sat down to the table to eat.

From the scraps of conversation that she heard she gathered that they had had a very tiring day.

When the General yawned twice before the dessert, she took courage.

She was careful to fix him a very nice tray, and choose a bottle of very rich wine for it.

When it was ready she blew out the light in the kitchen and bolted the door.

After listening a minute in the hall, until she was sure that all the officers were busy around the table, she stole softly up the stairs to the General's room.

A faint flicker of light from the lamps below made a patch on the floor in the doorway.

She put the tray down in its usual place and looked about her. She half hoped she would find the map spread out on the desk, but only a batch of white papers that looked ghostly in the dark cluttered the top of it.

She looked at the bed; it was cater-cornered across one corner of the room; the head board was

high enough to make hiding behind it comparatively safe.

Without hesitating longer she lay down on the floor, rolled under the bed, and wriggled to a standing position in the corner.

The wait that followed was the hardest part of all to endure. She heard doors open and shut, and the boards of the floor creak. At each new sound she would think, "He's coming at last," only to be disappointed.

When he did come there was no mistaking the heavy footsteps, and his deep voice as he called good night to one of the officers.

Lieutenant Schultz carried his lamp for him, and Marieken felt as if they must both be able to see her right through the headboard of the bed. But after an order or two, and a little grumbling on the part of the General that Fritz was no longer alive to be his orderly, the Lieutenant left, and the General, after making elaborate preparations for the night, blew out his candle and got heavily into bed.

CHAPTER XV

WHILE THE GENERAL SNORED

MARIEKEN felt the springs give under his weight, and for some unaccountable reason it frightened her. He was so near her that it seemed uncanny that he could be unaware of her presence.

But Marieken would not have been Marieken if she had not been able to throw off her fears and keep her keen little mind alert on the task ahead.

The General sighed loudly several times and rolled over before he fell asleep.

Marieken waited until the heavy breathing had gone on for a long time, then to make sure that he was really asleep she tapped gently on the headboard.

The breathing did not stop even for an instant, and she dropped quietly to her knees and crawled under the spring. She could see the sag that the General's body made. She lay quiet for a minute

and then rolled carefully out onto the floor. She was so near that she could have touched the pillow under the General's head.

She kept quiet for a long time, not daring to take the final step. His head seemed so heavy that she knew she would never be able to move it.

After a while she got to her knees and with one trembling hand felt around the edge of the pillow.

Her hand closed over something hard and cold, she pulled it out gingerly and examined it; it was the General's gold watch.

A sigh of annoyance escaped her, and she held her breath for fear the General would waken, but he slept on, so after waiting a minute she put her hand back under the pillow again. It was a thin little hand and did not take up much room. She felt everywhere, except directly under the General's head, and found nothing. Then with a courage born of desperation she slipped her hand under that; it closed over a flat something. Just as she was going to pull it out the General moved, grunted, rolled over obligingly so that

his back was to her, and started snoring contentedly.

Marieken's terror gave way to relief, and she wanted to laugh. She pulled out her hand and found she was holding tight to a flat black wallet.

She slipped it quickly into the pocket of her smock and crawled to the door, opened it, and crept downstairs as fast as she could.

George and Jeanneken were waiting for her in the cellar, and she showed them the wallet triumphantly.

"Where did you find it?" George demanded.

"Under the pillow that was under the head of the sleeping General," Marieken told him, and explained as best she could.

George had it opened by now and was pouring over the map, but he could make nothing of the notes along the side.

Marieken leaned over his shoulder. "That is Voorle," she said, pointing, "and that means,"—she puckered her brow as she tried to translate the military terms into a French that George could understand.

“You must take it,” she said at last, very slowly. “You can get away with it before he finds out, and—”

“And you can get shot. Not much.” George was firm. “I tell you what to do. You copy this writing while I study the map, and my colonel can have it translated.”

Marieken flew back to the house, up to the attic and returned out of breath with her note book and pencil that she kept hidden in the chimney chink. She found a clean page and copied out, as best she could, the notes that lined the margin of the map. She did not bother to try and understand what she wrote; she just copied as she had copied German exercises at the convent.

George studied the map over her shoulder, sometimes asking her a question.

It was a long task, but at last Marieken finished and George folded up the map and put it carefully back into the wallet.

“Do you think you can get it back without his hearing you,” he asked gravely, as Marieken put it back in her pocket.

“I guess so,” she said bravely. “Anyway I will wait till almost morning, by that time you will be in Voorle.”

George tried to say something, but he could not think of the French for it, so he spoke in English.

Whatever it was he said it seemed to have relieved his feelings.

Jeanneken gave him a bundle tied in a handkerchief, and he slipped the little book in it, then he pulled the crazy quilt of old Jacques over his head and led the way slowly up the ladder.

Marieken made sure that there was no one in sight, and thoughtfully waited outside while George said good-by to Jeanneken.

It was a long good-by for it is hard to leave the girl you are very much in love with at any time, and doubly hard in war, when the chances of your seeing her again are so slight; but Jeanneken was woman, and Belgian enough to put her country before all else, and George had learned by heart the English rule of playing the game, so it was not so very long before the dairy door opened and they both joined Marieken.

“Go by the fields,” she said, pointing, “and, oh, please hurry.” George laughed.

“Good-by,” he said, “but not for long. In a few days we will be back here to stay.”

He kissed Jeanneken again and shook Marieken by the hand, as though she were a man and a comrade.

Just before the deep shadow of the barn hid him from their sight Marieken called out softly.

“Give my love to Patsy, and find my Lieutenant Teutch.”

George waved and nodded in reply. He made a queer silhouette against the darkness, in his flowing quilt, for the wind was blowing and the ends flapped crazily about him as he walked.

The two girls watched after him for many minutes, their ears strained to hear the slightest strange sound.

Jeanneken shivered.

“You will be lonely in that cellar,” her cousin said tenderly. “I wish I could stay, but—”

Jeanneken shook her head. “No, I will be all right. It is you that I am worried about. How

will I know if you get the map back under the General's pillow? I will die of anxiety waiting and wondering all night."

Marieken pointed to the window across the court.

"Wait here," she said, "and I will light my candle for a second if I get back safely."

They kissed each other good night, and Marieken went back to the Inn.

Perfect silence reigned in the house as she felt her way through the kitchen and up the stairs. She had left the General's door open a crack, and even from the foot of the stairs she could hear his heavy breathing.

Very softly she stole up to the door and pushed it open.

The General was lying on the very edge of the bed, one arm hanging over the side.

Marieken touched it as she felt for the pillow.

She was so frightened that she very nearly screamed, but the General did not wake up. She decided that she would not try to find the pillow again, she took the wallet from her pocket and put

it on the floor under his hand, then as if she were being pursued by the entire German Army she fled down stairs and up to her attic.

She sat, trembling for a little, until she remembered Jeanneken. She lighted her candle and put it in the window for a brief second.

Jeanneken standing in the doorway of the dairy saw it and the relief made the tears come. She groped her way blindly to the cellar where she tried to stifle her sobs by burying her head in a very muddy khaki coat.

Marieken, after she had blown out the candle, stood looking at the black sky that was pierced by one tiny star just above her head.

“Oh, Papa, Papa,” she cried wearily, “please, please ask the good God not to make me do anything more, I am so, so tired—”

CHAPTER XVI

THE ENGLISH!

A MONTH followed. A month of rainy days, one so exactly like the other that Marieken lost track of time. Nothing eventful happened to interrupt the monotonous drone of the cannons, and life seemed less exciting than it had in the peaceful times before the war.

Jeanneken, hidden securely in the dairy cellar, with only the muddy khaki suit for company, dreamed and hoped the time away.

But Marieken cooked the General's three meals every day, listened to his constant boasting and bragging, and now and again stamped her little foot with exasperated impatience at the delay of the English.

Now and then grave doubts of George's safety kept her awake at night as she lay listening to the

soft ooze of the rain on the thatched roof, but by morning her sane reasoning dispelled her doubts, for she knew that if the all-important book had been found in his bundle, the General would have been the first to hear of it, and she, Marieken, the second.

“But,” as she said to the Curé one day, “this quiet waiting is heart-breaking. Every day those German pigs eat up more of my supplies.”

The Curé shook his head gravely and she went off to old Jacques to be cheered up. His absolute faith and enthusiasm were untiring.

“Just wait,” he would say slyly, and always in a mysterious tone; “they will come, and mark my words it will not be very long now. Some day the guns will sound louder and the shells will burst nearer. We will all have to run to save ourselves, there will be flames as there were before, but”—and here he would laugh as delightedly as a child—“when they stop, those guns, Zandre will be again a Belgian village.”

Then Marieken, because she wanted to believe it very much, would go home singing with a light

heart, and creep down to the dairy cellar to tell Jeanneken.

Jeanneken always scoffed and called Jacques a simple old man. She preferred to pin her faith to the promises of her stalwart private George Hawkins.

But for that matter they were both right, for one morning, just a little after sunrise, the noise of the guns did grow louder and the shells burst nearer.

Marieken was the only one in the Inn who was up. The General had ordered an early breakfast, and she was busy in the kitchen when she heard the first explosion.

She hurried to the window, but she could see nothing beyond the gray mist that hung low over the edge of the village.

A few minutes of quiet followed, time enough to boil an egg, and then another explosion followed by another and another came.

That was the beginning, the rest of the terrifying events followed in rapid succession.

The heavy fire continued for a time and deafened every other sound.

The General and his officers hurried downstairs to send out messengers.

The officer at the telegraph station came to report the wires down. The few soldiers who were in camp at the far end of the village road were ordered out, and stood waiting at attention before the Inn.

No one but the General bothered with breakfast, the rest shouted and gave orders, conferred in excited whispers with one another and then one by one mounted their horses and rode off straight in the direction of the fire.

Marieken watched them go with a smile; it was a grim smile, too grim for a mouth that had only smiled for so brief a time as fourteen years.

“Good-by, my German guests. I think I will not see you again,” she said aloud.

The General was beside her, but fortunately did not hear her words. He was too busy trying to adjust his helmet.

Marieken watched him curiously. By the expression of his face and the look in his little pig eyes she knew that this was a surprise attack, and no amount of blustering on his part could convince her that it was not.

Just before he mounted his horse he called to her,

“We will be back in time for dinner, Fräulein. Be sure and have a good one ready promptly at six.”

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a thundering of many hoofs, and the thump of many boots, came suddenly from just behind the heavy curtain of fire. The crack of rifles struck staccato notes in the roar of the cannon, and a muffled roar of human voices came back to the watchers on the Inn steps.

In sight, and hurrying down the road, were the same little group of villagers that Marieken had sheltered in the last attack. She ran to meet them.

“They are coming,” old Jacques announced

triumphantly, "but these silly women are afraid to wait."

"Hush!" Marieken exclaimed angrily, "not another word." She led the way around to the kitchen door by way of the courtyard and out of sight of the General, and opened the cellar door.

Time enough to find out what was happening before she gave away the secret of the dairy. The Curé helped her bring down her mother, and under cover of the confusion she took her down to the dairy cellar to Jeanneken.

The Curé stayed with them, for the Burgo-master was with the others in the Inn cellar, and Marieken hurried back to the road.

She was just in time to see the officer that she had bidden good-by to gallop back at full speed. Lieutenant Schultz reported to the General without the formality of a salute.

"They are our men, sir, retreating under a heavy attack; the English are advancing all along the line."

The General's face was purple with rage and he dashed back into the Inn.

“Order the men to rally at the end of the road behind that house. Hide a machine gun in the ruins of the town hall, then keep under cover,” he ordered. The men hurried to obey.

By this time the rifle shots had stopped, and a body of bedraggled men in helmets were running as fast as they could down the road.

Marieken did not wait until they were any nearer. She left the General still giving commands and ran hurriedly out the back door.

Shells were falling in every direction, kicking up the dirt in great pieces and leaving deep ugly holes in the field.

At first she tried to lie down when she heard the warning screech of the “whizz bangs,” but they came so often that she gave it up and plunged ahead as fast as she could.

There was no definite thought in her mind; she was going to warn Captain Teutch, Patsy and George about the hidden gun in the town hall, and how she was going to do it bothered her not at all.

The retreating army of Germans were keeping

to the roads, and except for the shells the fields were free.

Once she turned around, the men seemed to be swallowed up. Back of the town hall the street looked deserted; the General was laying his trap quickly. She stopped long enough to see some men tugging at the ropes of a small gun, the sight made her double her speed. All the cries of the men were far behind and seemed to have stopped for the most part.

Marieken wondered how far the English were.

She was taking the same route that she had traveled on the night she had delivered the letter to the English trenches, and she knew that she would soon reach the road, as it curved by the north boundary of the woods; surely the English would be in the woods.

As she neared it she saw men running, every now and again they would trip and fall over the dead bodies of their comrades that cluttered the road.

She shivered as she saw them, and kept her eyes straight ahead.

She was well in front of the town hall by now, and she decided to try and reach the road. The shells were falling so fast that she laid down flat and wriggled the short distance.

More men were running, but in the noise from the bursting shells she could not tell who they were.

She was just going to call out when something hot and stinging pierced her shoulder, and for a little she lay very still.

CHAPTER XVII

PATSY

WHEN she opened her eyes again there was a confused jangling in her head, and she thought she heard singing, that gave way to the heavy tramp, tramp of men running. She turned her head a little; there was a big brown boot not a foot away from her. She made a desperate effort to clutch at it, and her fingers caught the boot lace, and her eyes closed again.

The foot stopped, and a deep voice sounded comfortingly in her ear.

“Glory be to the Saints in Hiven, it’s the kid! Darlint, what have they done to ye?” She felt herself being gently lifted up by strong arms.

Her eyes opened slowly, and the first thing they saw was a mop of fiery red hair surmounting a dirty, mud-bespattered face.

“Patsy,” she almost sobbed the word, then the

pain in her shoulder made her wince, and she remembered why she had come.

It was very hard to make Patsy understand about the gun; he seemed to think that she was talking about the pain in her shoulder, and he patted her soothingly.

“There, there, me darlint, it’s all right ye’ll be in no time; shure Patsy will take ye back safe, niver fear,” he comforted.

Marieken shook her head and pointed hysterically down the road. To her relief the Irishman seemed to understand.

“Blast the language,” he said, “wait a bit. Hi, Alf, tell one of those Belgians to come here and get aholt of the Captain. The kid’s got something up her sleeve.”

Marieken tried to turn her head to see Alf, but it made her so dizzy that she fainted.

When she came to—it was not a minute later—she could have shouted for joy, for the man who stood over her looking anxiously into her face was dressed in the uniform of a Belgian soldier.

She did not try to understand why he was



“Marieken pointed hysterically down the road”

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there; there was no time for idle speculation. She explained hurriedly about the hidden gun, but her eyes feasted on the gray-blue uniform.

“The Germans are hidden in all the houses, and there is a gun in the town hall,” she said weakly, then her head fell back on Patsy’s supporting shoulder.

The next few hours were a blur. She heard shouted commands that she could not understand, and now and again a few words of her own Flemish tongue.

The guns roared incessantly, but she knew the shells were not near her. She had a queer feeling of motion that she did not quite understand, but the comforting nearness of Patsy—she could feel his big heart beat—kept her from worrying.

She wondered about her mother and Jeanneken, but she couldn’t seem to remember where they were, and before she knew it she was dreaming that she was all dressed in a soft white dress with a blue bow on her hair and walking over smooth green lawns holding somebody’s hand. She looked up to see who it was and discovered it

was Captain Teutch; then just as he was going to speak to her a very dirty yellow dog ran out of a house and everything grew black all of a sudden. She tried hard to keep looking at the green lawns, but they seemed to slip away from her, and she was alone for a long, long time in the darkness. A voice that she had not heard for a long time was speaking to her when she next opened her eyes, and a soft, but very thin hand was stroking her head.

“Little Mother,” she whispered softly.

“Marieken! Marieken! my baby girl,”—Madame De Bruin’s eyes were filled with tears, and the light of intelligence had come back to them.

An hour before, Patsy had stumbled down to the dairy cellar with Marieken in his arms. The sight of blood on her neck seemed to act as a sudden shock. Madame De Bruin had been cowering in a corner up until then, but she was the first to hold out her arms to Patsy, and between them they laid Marieken in the straw. After that her old look returned, and she was again the capable innkeeper’s wife.

She forgot Henri, forgot her husband and even the guns above her, in her anxiety for her little daughter.

Marieken looked about her with interest. Several khaki figures were lying beside her, and Jeanneken and a young doctor seemed to be the most important persons in the room. They were very busy going from one to the other of the prostrate men.

Marieken felt a tinge of jealousy. Up until now she had always been the leader, and she resented Jeanneken's sudden importance. She felt her shoulder gingerly; it was carefully bandaged and didn't hurt very much, so she tried sitting up.

Her mother tried to push her back gently, but she wouldn't have it.

"What's happened?" she demanded. The doctor and Jeanneken turned to look at her; there were a lot of candles burning and the cellar was quite bright.

"Ah, little one, are you better?"—the doctor was a Belgian and spoke in Flemish. "Everything is all right; you mustn't worry; try and go

back to sleep like a good little girl," he said soothingly and turned to Jeanneken.

"I will do no such thing," Marieken replied angrily, "and I am not a little girl." She would have undoubtedly stamped her foot had she been able to.

"Tell me what has happened. Did I get shot?" she demanded.

The doctor laughed, and answered her without turning from his patient.

"No, little firebrand, you were only slightly wounded by a bit of bursting shrapnel." He might have said more, but the door above them opened and a voice called.

"It's safe to bring them up here now, Doctor; there's not a Boche in sight. Shall I send down the stretcher bearers?"

The doctor nodded and Marieken got to her feet.

"It's all right, little Mother," she said as Madame De Bruin protested weakly. "I am all well again, and there will be lots to do." She was half way up the ladder before the doctor

noticed her, and her flashing eyes told him it would be useless to try and keep her back without actual force, and he had as much as he could do with the wounded soldiers.

The first thing Marieken did when she reached the courtyard was to ask questions of one of the Belgians who was filling a bucket of water at the pump.

He explained everything that she wanted to know.

“There was a fight,” he said, “a bad fight; the Germans were hiding in the houses, but our Captain knew they were there.”

Marieken smiled to herself.

“But how do you happen to be with the English?” she demanded. The Belgian shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know,” he admitted, “but we were fighting on the right of the Voorle and the English on the left. We both planned attacks at the same time, early this morning. They fought from their side, we from ours, and we met; that is all. At first we were surprised, but, oh, we were glad;

it was a fine fight; the Boches ran away and we chased them."

Marieken was about to answer, but her mother, who had followed her, put her hand on the soldier's arm.

"You do not know anything of my son, do you?" she asked, trembling. "His name is Henri De Bruin; he is very young and very brave." She watched him anxiously.

The soldier shook his head. "I do not, Madame," he said sorrowfully, "but rest assured he is safe. To-night, I myself will ask our captain to find out about him for you," he promised, "so do not worry; no news is good news."

Madame De Bruin thanked him wearily, and Marieken led her gently to the Inn. At sight of her kitchen upside down she stamped her foot.

"Little Mama, do look at this! What an outrage! Mud, dirt, everything upside down." She pushed her mother gently through the green baize door. Sophie was in the dining-room trying to restore some sort of order.

She hurried to Marieken. "Child, you must sit

down, you are wounded," she said, but Marieken would not wait for her to say more.

"I am not," she denied stoutly; "it is a mere nothing. Do stop being so silly, there is much work to do. Take Mama upstairs and get ready as many beds as possible," she directed; "they are bringing in the wounded." Sophie obeyed without a word, and Madame De Bruin followed her.

Marieken went back to the kitchen.

"Of course the fire is out," she said to herself; "well, I will soon build another; these men must be fed." She went out and was just lifting a big piece of wood from a pile beside the barn when Patsy appeared around the corner.

"And phwat are ye doin' with that wood?" he demanded. "Lave it lay this minute." He took the log away from her and gathered an armful.

Marieken looked at him and grinned.

"Lead on," he directed importantly.

Marieken went back to the kitchen where Patsy made the fire, and, with the assistance of Alf, tidied the kitchen, Marieken giving orders from a big chair in the center of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

MARIEKEN RECEIVES TWO DECORATIONS

SHE was still sitting there, surrounded by an admiring group of Belgian and English soldiers, all eating heartily the jars of preserves, and the provisions in the dairy cellar were at last fulfilling their destiny, when the courtyard again rang with the clatter of horses' hoofs and the tramp of marching footsteps, but this time there was no fear in her heart at the sound.

More of her brave soldiers were coming to be fed, that was all, and she smiled happily at the thought.

Her cheeks were flushed and there was a queer, brilliant light in her eyes. Her shoulder hurt her when she had time to think about it. But she was very feverish, and the excitement of the day kept her at high pitch.

She was so busy watching the men break ranks, in the courtyard, through the window, that she did not notice that some one pushed open the green baize door behind her and tiptoed into the room.

“Hello, I’ve been hunting everywhere for you.” A voice very low and gentle, with the suspicion of a laugh in it, said in French.

She turned around abruptly. Patsy and the rest were standing at attention.

“Lieutenant Teutch!” she exclaimed joyfully, and ran to him.

“Not Lieutenant Teutch any more; I’m Captain Blythe now,” he corrected as he held her thin shoulders in his big hands and stared at her for a full minute. She looked so frail and tired in her short black smock, and the feverish light in her eyes made him think of a very strong spirit imprisoned by a ridiculously slim little figure.

He sat down in the big chair and pulled her down to his knee.

“Why aren’t you in bed?” he asked at last.

“I don’t want to go to bed; I’m not tired,” Marieken replied. “I’m going to stay up and cook

dinner for you, such a dinner! I have dreamed about it so long and now it's really coming true. Only fancy, I will make everything ready as usual and then I will pick up my tray, push open that door. Oh, I have pushed it open so many times, Monsieur Le Capitaine,—and all the time I will pretend that everything is just as usual. I will shut my eyes tight as I go through the door, and then when I am in the room I will open them quick, like this—and I will see! Oh, Monsieur, I am so happy when I think what I will see. In the chair of that pig of a general will be a Belgian, not a general, perhaps, but, bah, a soldier of ours is worth five, no ten, fat German generals; then beside him will be the rest, all Belgians and English; they will all be laughing like—like Patsy,” she explained, pointing to the Irishman who was looking at her with an expression that you see sometimes in a setter's brown eyes as he looks at an adored master. The Captain laughed.

“But, dear child,” he said gently, “you are not strong enough to get a dinner for so many hungry men.”

Marieken looked at him in disdain.

“Monsieur Le Capitaine,” she said proudly, “do you think I have never cooked for hungry men before? Think, I beseech you, of the meals I have served to those Germans, and every one knows that they eat more than anybody else.”

The Captain shook his head in despair.

“But, Marieken, you were not tired then, and you did not have a bad wound in your shoulder.” Then as he saw the dark eyes fill with tears he hastened to add, “I have a very fine idea; you let the men get most of the dinner, tell them just what to do and they’ll obey every instruction, and then when it comes to the omelet, why, you make that.”

Marieken looked at him doubtfully, then she said decidedly,

“Very well, Monsieur, I will cook only the omelet, as you ask, but Sophie and Jeanneken shall cook the rest. I will have no stupid men in my kitchen.”

The Captain laughed heartily. “Very well then, that’s settled, and you promise faithfully to

sit quiet in this chair and not to cook anything but the omelet?"

"I promise," Marieken agreed seriously, and got down from his knee and went to find Sophie.

All the wounded, and there were very few, had been carried to the second floor of the Inn and settled comfortably in beds.

Jeanneken was in charge of them all while the doctor snatched a little rest. She was sitting beside George, and stroking his head gently, when Marieken found her. She looked very efficient and capable, her little cousin thought, and it surprised her for she had always thought of Jeanneken as very delicate and beautiful and nothing more.

"I didn't know he was wounded," she whispered as she looked at the sleeping George.

Jeanneken nodded. "His arm," she replied; "the doctor says perhaps it must come off, but, he will live, so what does it matter?"

Marieken tried not to cry, but the fever made her very weak.

“Poor George Hawkins,” she said softly, and hurried from the room.

She found Sophie and her mother and Mère Marie busy in another part of the house. They were trying to get the officers’ rooms in order. She interrupted them and made them all go to the kitchen.

Then for the next hour they worked hard. It might have been a feast of old that they were preparing instead of a very simple meal. Madame De Bruin even smiled a little as she hurried from the pantry to the table, or stirred a pot on the stove.

The soldiers hung around the door, eager to help, and Patsy kept watch over Marieken as if he had been her jailer. When Sophie did not put enough seasoning in the soup, and she started to do it herself, he pushed her gently, but firmly, back in the chair.

“No, ye don’t, me darlint, me orders were to keep you quiet, and quiet ye’ll be.”

Marieken did not understand his explanation,

but no one could be angry with the grinning Patsy, and she sank back in her chair and watched night creep gently over the village.

At first there were long shadows that lengthened as the sun sank behind the rim of the old church, and then the darkness seemed to come all at once.

At last the dinner was ready, and with trembling fingers she made the omelet.

There were nine officers at the table, ranking from a Belgian colonel to an English second lieutenant, but not one of them spoke a word as the green baize door opened and Marieken came through it, carrying a heavy tray, assisted by a Belgian orderly.

She shut her eyes as she had planned to do and when she opened them her pinched little face went dead white for a minute, then the hot flush flowed back again and she gave a deep happy sigh.

With help she served the dinner, and the men watched her quietly. When at last the coffee came, the Colonel rose to his feet and lifted his wine glass.

“To the littlest Belgian soldier,” he said gravely.

Marieken was standing by the Captain, and at first she did not exactly understand. When all the officers looked at her, she felt suddenly shy and buried her head in the Captain’s coat. He put his arm round her and held her tight.

After the toast, when they all sat down to the table again, he lifted her on his lap.

She looked at him and smiled.

Then because she was very tired and sleepy she closed her eyes, her head slipped to a comfortable place on the Captain’s shoulder, and she fell sound asleep.

For a long time the men watched her and talked in whispers.

The Captain had only told them of her warning about the hidden gun; they did not know of her other courageous deeds.

When he was sure that his voice would not wake her he related what he knew of the rest.

The men listened in astonishment, and not in-

frequently one of them would blow his nose loudly and cough to hide his feelings.

“To-day you know what she did,” the Captain finished, “it’s quite a story, isn’t it?” He moved her head gently and unfastened the bar of colored ribbon that he wore on his coat. It was the service bar for the V. C. He pinned it clumsily on the soiled black smock.

“It’s really hers by right,” he said quietly.

The Belgian Colonel nodded. He was wearing the Cross of King Albert around his neck. He slipped it over his head gravely and hung it reverently beside the symbol of the other cross. The rest rose to their feet and drank another toast, all but the Captain, he could not move for Marieken’s golden head was still resting on his shoulder as she slept on, unconscious of the honors bestowed upon her.

CHAPTER XIX

DAYS OF REST

A GREEN lawn, flooded with the later afternoon sunshine, stretched out invitingly from either side of a poplar-bordered roadway. An occasional bird chirruped and twittered in the treetops, and a flock of rainbow-tinted butterflies hovered around a single rose bush.

A broad house of gray stone stood at the end of the road, and its windows gave back the reflection of the sun as it sank lazily in the west. Farther on, beyond the other end of the road, a little clump of cottages snuggled securely around a tiny square, paved with great warm flagstones. Nothing broke the stillness and peace of the afternoon, and the village of Fleurette drowsed contentedly, apparently unconscious of the thunder of the guns away to the north.

Three months had passed since Zandre had been taken away from the astonished Germans, and Marieken had been honored by both the Belgian and the English armies.

They had been busy months, and had witnessed many changes.

First of all had come a Red Cross automobile, bringing a smiling American girl in a dark blue cap. She had talked for a long time to Captain Blythe, and the outcome of the talk had been a long ride in the same automobile for Marieken, her mother and Jeanneken.

At first Marieken had flatly refused to leave the Inn, but when the old Curé and the Burgomaster, as well as the Captain and the American girl, not to mention Patsy, had insisted, she gave in. She sat beside the American girl, whose name was Miss Brooks, in the automobile, and before Zandre was out of sight she was talking to her as if she had known her for a long time.

They had stopped at a village a long ways behind the lines, and Marieken had been put to bed and kept there until the wound in her shoulder

was well and the fever had gone. Her mother had stayed with her, but Miss Brooks had taken Jeanneken away with her. The little village was very uninteresting, and Marieken was beginning to get very tired of doing nothing, when one day the automobile came down the little street and she and her mother were whisked away again by the powerful Miss Brooks. This time they rode through fields that were green instead of pock-marked by ugly shell holes, and they heard birds in the trees.

Their destination was Fleurette, a tiny little village far away from the fighting. The big house in the center of the green lawn was a convalescent hospital. Miss Brooks was in charge of it, and Jeanneken was now one of the helpers. She wore a blue dress and something over her hair to keep it from flying, and Marieken thought she looked like a nun; she was working very hard.

Private George Hawkins had recovered from his wound and had gone back to fight in another attack from which he had come out unharmed, and with the exalted rank of corporal.

Marieken and her mother did not stay at the hospital, but lived in the village with some kindly folk who took very good care of them and treated Marieken as if she were some rare being from another planet.

At first this pleased her, and she went about looking at the green trees and the flowers in perfect contentment, but after a little the old restless spirit asserted itself.

She besieged Miss Brooks to let her help Jeanneken at the hospital. As it happened they were short-handed and more patients were coming every day, so Miss Brooks, after a little demur, gave in, and Marieken went down to the great high-raftered kitchen and worked at anything she could find to do.

Most of the nurses were Americans and they spoiled their new helper whenever they had a minute to spare.

When this chapter opens one of them, a Miss Grace Lucas, was sitting with her back to a tree on the green lawn at the side of the house, beside

a Belgian soldier who was sitting propped up by cushions on a comfortable steamer chair.

Marieken was sitting on the ground beside them.

“Teach me some English words,” she said, smiling at Miss Lucas.

“What do you want to say?” the nurse inquired good naturedly.

“Oh, how do you do, Captain; I am very glad to see you.”

Miss Lucas, repeated the words slowly in English, and Marieken and the soldier both tried to pronounce them, but it was useless. At last Marieken gave up in despair. “I will never learn your language,” she said forlornly, “and I wanted to so much.”

“But you can speak German,” Miss Lucas reminded her, “so you ought not to expect to know too much.”

“But I want to speak English too. Please say it again to me,” Marieken insisted.

Miss Lucas laughed and repeated the phrase slowly.

“Good morning, Captain; I am very glad to see you.”

Marieken pursed up her lips to try and say the words, but the sight of Jeanneken coming across the lawn made her stop and call out instead.

“What is it?”

Jeanneken flourished a letter, but she did not reply until she was seated on the ground beside them. Then she turned a face, flushed with happy blushes, to Miss Lucas.

“It is a letter—a long letter from George,” she said, “and it is written in English—I can read so little, it is hard, and though I have tried I cannot understand,” she said.

“Why does he write to you in English?” Marieken exclaimed; “his French is quite good.”

“But I wrote him that I was learning his language from the kind Miss Lucas; perhaps I bragged a little about it, so you see he is answering, and of course, I cannot make it out—writing is so different from speaking.”

Miss Lucas had watched Jeanneken with a smile; her confusion was very pretty.

“Shall I help?” she offered, “I may be able to understand, and—” she added with a little laugh, “I promise not to tell what he says.”

“That is just it,” Jeanneken replied with engaging frankness; “you see I cannot tell what is in it, and perhaps—”

“Oh, bother,” Marieken interrupted, “we understand, you think perhaps he has been silly and sentimental, but you will see he hasn’t. Englishmen do not say silly things. When they are most serious inside they laugh; I know,” she added proudly, “for that is the way with my Captain.”

“You are very wise,” the Belgian soldier laughed, “and you are right, I have fought beside them and they are always laughing.”

“Come Jeanneken,” Miss Lucas held out her hand for the letter.

“We will all help you translate it.”

Very reluctantly Jeanneken handed over the letter and Miss Lucas read it, translating it as best she could:

“Dearest Jeannie,

“How is that for a beginning? You see I have

just found out that Jeanneken means Little Jeanne in your language, and I am very proud of myself.

“You are not the only one who is taking lessons, Miss ——.”

“What does he mean by that?” Jeanneken asked.

“He must be studying, too; perhaps he has found a Belgian to teach him,” Miss Lucas explained.

“Then he wishes to learn my language; that is very dear of him,” Jeanneken replied happily, and looked self-conscious.

Miss Lucas returned to the letter.

“You’re a little bit of all right to bother your sweet head with English, and I guess you know how much I appreciate it—”

“It looks as if you both agreed on that anyway,” Miss Lucas laughed.

But Jeanneken looked puzzled.

“Why does he say ‘only a little bit of all right,’ I want so to have him think I am all all right?” she complained.

It was Miss Lucas' turn to look puzzled.

"That's what he means, my dear, I can't explain why, but a 'little bit of all right,' means lots more than if he had said just all right."

Jeanneken accepted the explanation politely, but she did not understand at all. It was Marieken who finally dispelled her doubts.

"I know what he means," she said seriously. "Right, is a great big something, like the world or the sky or the stars, and you are a little bit of it. You see it would be silly for him to say that you were all of it, and indeed its an honor to be even a little bit," she added.

"There now, surely that satisfies you," the soldier laughed. "I have often wondered myself why the English say that, and perhaps our little Marieken has really told us."

"Anyway it's a beautiful explanation and I'm sure it's what George meant," Miss Lucas said; "let's see." She picked up the letter again. "He uses it again," she laughed; "listen."

"But then I think you are a little bit all right any old way you look at it. Queer our running

into each other that day in the old ladies' house; wasn't it?

"I can remember when I heard your voice; a real treat it was, I can tell you, and that jolly dinner we had; you laughed same as us, you'd have thought you hadn't a care in the world, and the shine you gave our boots. Why Jeanneken—(I kind of like that way of saying it best—")

"I am glad of that," Jeanneken put in gently, without seeming to interrupt.

"I get a sort of hot feeling in my eyes when I think of it. As I said before you're a little bit of all right."

This time Jeanneken smiled.

"We had a pretty hot time last time we were up front; Fritz was rather nasty, he kept sending over more shells than usual and he acted so mysterious that our Captain sent us over to have a look. It's a queer feeling I can tell you, crawling out in the dark and listening right up at Fritz's front door, as you might say, but we got back all right, but we had a bit of a surprise. We were bringing back what we thought was a Hun,

but bless me it was one of your countrymen—a Belgian—guess what he'd been at? Pumping old Fritz for all he was worth and Fritz didn't know it, 'cause Henri wore a coat and helmet that he'd found, and though they didn't fit him he made good. He was waiting to creep over to our lines when we made our little surprise attack. I thought he held up his hand and hollered 'Kamarad' in pretty much of a hurry, but I never suspected until we had him back in the trench and our Captain was questioning him—he'd been in no end of danger, he had, and he was as cool as a daisy; courage to spare. Why he made us look sick, but that's the way with your fellows, they seem to like taking chances and being careless with their lives, and that's the reason they're going to win, they and their cousin, the little poilu. Of course you understand that Tommy Atkins is going to lend a helping hand on the side, and when the war is over and the busses run from Paris to Berlin, why the future Mrs. George Hawkins is going to have the latest in wedding rings—

“Oh,” Jeanneken laughed excitedly, and her eyes looked at the third finger of her left hand.

“And any little thing besides that a poor old soldier can give her. In the meantime ten kisses. Keep up your courage and if I get a few days leave I’ll be with you; you can count on that.

“All my love you understand, and thanking you in advance for yours, I am

“Your loving George.”

“Is that all?” Jeanneken asked. Miss Lucas chuckled.

“Yes, it’s all, and I think it’s a perfectly lovely letter; don’t you, Marieken?”

Marieken gave herself a little shake, her thoughts had been with the Belgian soldier whose name was Henri.

“Of course I do,” she agreed promptly.

“Oh, the English are fine fellows,” the Belgian exclaimed, “they are—how is it you say—‘a little bit all right.’ ”

Jeanneken looked up and smiled.

“I know one who is all all right,” she said shyly.

They laughed away the rest of the afternoon, and it was not until the sun disappeared into a bank of clouds, tinting them a shell pink, that they moved the soldier back into the ward and set about their evening duties.

Jeanneken's work was almost altogether in the kitchen. She cooked some of the special dishes for the sick men, and Marieken helped her. Only on the rarest occasion did they go up to the wards.

This evening after the dishes were all washed and put away, and the rest of the kitchen was in spick-and-span order, the two cousins walked down the road slowly, arm in arm. Marieken went back to sleep with her mother in the village every night, and Jeanneken always walked half of the distance with her.

To-night they were both very thoughtful. At last Marieken said:

“Do you think we will ever hear again of Henri or Josef?”

Her cousin shook her head.

“Only the good God knows. Of Josef I have no fear; he is with our soldiers, and I know they will not let him go too near danger. The men he went off with were going into billets, and surely they found him a home that was safe. A little boy could not be allowed into the trenches. But of Henri,” she paused. “Does she ask for him often?” she inquired.

Marieken nodded.

“Not in words, no. She sews all day on the nightshirts for the patients, and every time I come in she smiles, but her eyes, they are asking every second: where is Henri?”

“Well, we must not give up hope; some day we will all be together again, and the Inn will be as jolly and gay on the feast days as ever,” Jeanneken said bravely.

Marieken looked at her in surprise. She was wondering if she had forgotten Corporal Hawkins, but she did not ask the question, for at that moment a heavy rumbling noise made them stop and listen.

“It can’t be the guns,” Jeanneken said excitedly.

“No, no. They make another kind of noise. Listen, they are automobiles, lots of them; I have heard them before,” Marieken explained.

They waited, and in a short time a big gray motor lorry, followed by a train of others, rumbled down the road.

The girls waited beside the road for them to pass, and watched them turn into the hospital driveway.

“More wounded; I must go back and help,” Jeanneken said. “What a lot there must be.”

“Perhaps some of the cars have supplies,” Marieken suggested; but you’d better hurry. Good night.”

“Good night,” Jeanneken called over her shoulder as she ran back to the hospital, and Marieken walked slowly the rest of the way to the village, her thoughts still on the story of the brave Belgian named Henri.

CHAPTER XX

A REUNION

THE next morning all was stir and bustle at the hospital. The big motor lorries had been filled with wounded, well enough to be transferred from the base hospitals to the convalescent homes.

Fleurette was getting its share of them, and poor Miss Brooks was beside herself to know where to find extra beds.

The work in the kitchen was almost doubled, and Marieken was working furiously.

“Are they English or Belgian?” she asked Miss Lucas, as she darted through the hall.

“Belgians, and some of them are much too sick to have been moved, poor fellows, but there has been a terrible battle, goodness knows where, and they had to clear the hospitals for the badly wounded. Gracious, what’s that?”

The chug, chug of a motor cycle outside sent her hurrying to the front door.

Marieken returned to the kitchen and busied herself with preparing some trays that were on the long side table. She was hunting for the blue cup that matched a certain blue saucer, the pride and envy of the ward, when Miss Lucas returned. She was breathless with excitement and her cheeks and eyes were glowing.

“Girls, it has come at last,” she said in English, “come quickly. America has declared war.” Every one in the room, including Jeanneken, who was filling a hot-water bottle, dropped what they were doing and hurried after Miss Lucas to the front hall, where they surrounded a tired and dusty, but triumphant, messenger.

Marieken was alone in the kitchen. She had not understood what Miss Lucas had said, for Jeanneken’s English lessons had progressed far more rapidly than hers.

Instead of following to find out what it was all about, she picked up the forgotten hot-water bottle and filled it. She was careful to let the air

out before she screwed in the stopper, as Miss Brooks had showed her. When she felt to her own satisfaction that it was soft enough she picked it up, along with a glass of egg-nog that she found ready, and went up the back way to one of the wards.

She stopped in the doorway and looked around her. The room was decorated in gold and white, a magnificent crystal chandelier hung in the center of it, and the walls and ceilings were decorated with delicate frescoes. In the days before the war it had been the ballroom of the famous old château; it made a queer setting now for the rows of white iron beds that lined either wall.

Marieken looked down at the men; their faces were new to her, and she knew they were some of the arrivals of the night before.

“Who wanted a hot-water bottle?” she asked.

The men turned their heads to look, and one at the far end of the room sat up suddenly.

“Am I dreaming,” he said excitedly, “tell me, tell me, comrade.”

But there was no need for him to say more.

Marieken looked at him in unbelievable joy, dropped the bag of hot water and the glass of egg-nog and shouted, "Henri, my brother!" and darted to him.

Henri kissed her and exclaimed and kissed her again. The men smiled delightedly, in spite of their suffering, and more than one whispered, "Lucky dog."

It was a long time before Marieken could collect her scattered and excited wits. When she did it was to find Miss Lucas and Miss Brooks mopping up the egg-nog. She tried to apologize.

"Never mind, dear child. I would have dropped it too if I had been in your place, and you've found your wonderful Henri at last, and now the little mother will be happy again. Run and tell her quickly. I'll find your cousin."

Marieken raced down the steps and out to the driveway, down the road that seemed to have stretched to twice its usual length, and at last in through the little door of the cottage where her mother was sewing.

"Mama, Mama," she said, "I have wonderful,"

—but she got no farther. Madame De Bruin stood up and let her work fall to the floor.

“Henri, you have found him?” she said trembling. “Where is he?”

Marieken looked at her in wonder.

“At the hospital, safe and almost well. But how did you guess?”

Madame De Bruin looked up and smiled, as she started towards the door.

They hurried back up the road. Miss Brooks met them at the door of the château.

“We’ve moved him in here, dear, so that you could talk and not disturb the rest,”—she pointed to a little room to the right.

Madame De Bruin was in it, and on her knees beside her son in an instant. Jeanneken was standing at the foot of the bed.

“Only fancy,” she said joyfully, “it was Henri’s regiment that Josef ran off with, only a different company. The soldiers kept him with them for a mascot, and when they went back to the trenches the little wretch joined the boy scouts. He must have told some fine fibs about his age.”

Marieken laughed happily. "Oh, I knew he would take care of himself," she said.

They sat with Henri for the rest of the morning, plying him with questions.

He told them very little about the war, but a great deal about his little maraine in America.

"What was her name?" his mother inquired. "May the good God bless her for being kind to my boy."

"Her name was Helen Carey," Henri replied, "and she had, oh, so many brothers,—or no—boys that she called brothers, and now that America had joined us I suppose they will all come over and fight, but some day I will read you all her letters, then you will see how nice she is. No more about her now; tell me about yourself. I hear that my Marieken is a brave girl, but I always knew that. Now, now, little mother, don't cry. I am safe and well, there, there."

He patted his mother's gray hair lovingly, and she sobbed out her relief on the pillow beside him.

"Henri, my little Risken," she whispered.

The two girls stole softly out of the room.

CHAPTER XXI

INTRODUCING ALICE BLYTHE

A WEEK later, when the hospital had recovered from the excitement that the reunion of the De Bruin family had caused and things were again running smoothly, Miss Brooks entered the kitchen with a smile lurking in the corner of her mouth.

“Marieken,” she called gravely, “there is a gentleman here to see you.”

Marieken, who was busy scouring some pans, looked up in dismay.

“To see me? But who is he?”

“I don’t know,” Miss Brooks teased. “You’d better go and find out; but first put on a clean apron; here’s one that will just fit you; run in the pantry and put it on.”

Marieken took the bundle of soft white and hurried to the pantry. She did not see until she had unfolded it that the “apron,” so called, was a new

white dress with a blue belt. She was so excited over the discovery that she had to call Jeanneken to help her put it on.

When she was buttoned up, and a hasty comb had been run through her hair, she followed Miss Brooks to the little reception room.

Captain Blythe was standing directly under the chandelier, and his head very nearly touched it.

"Hello! My, but you do look fine," he said by way of greeting, but Marieken threw herself into his arms and kissed him enthusiastically.

"Glad to see me as all that?" he asked, laughing.

Marieken nodded.

"Did you bring me this lovely dress?" she demanded.

Captain Blythe looked at her simple white frock.

"No," he said slowly, "that's a little present from my sister Alice. I've told her about you and she thinks you're fine. She says she's coming over here to see you some day."

They had moved toward the door while they talked, and down the broad steps to the lawn.

The Captain was holding Marieken's hand, and she had a queer feeling that it had all happened before.

The Captain took a small note book from his pocket, and she recognized it as the one she gave to George. He opened it at a page that was all filled with x's.

"Will you please tell me what all those mean," he said, smiling quietly; "it's worried them at headquarters a lot."

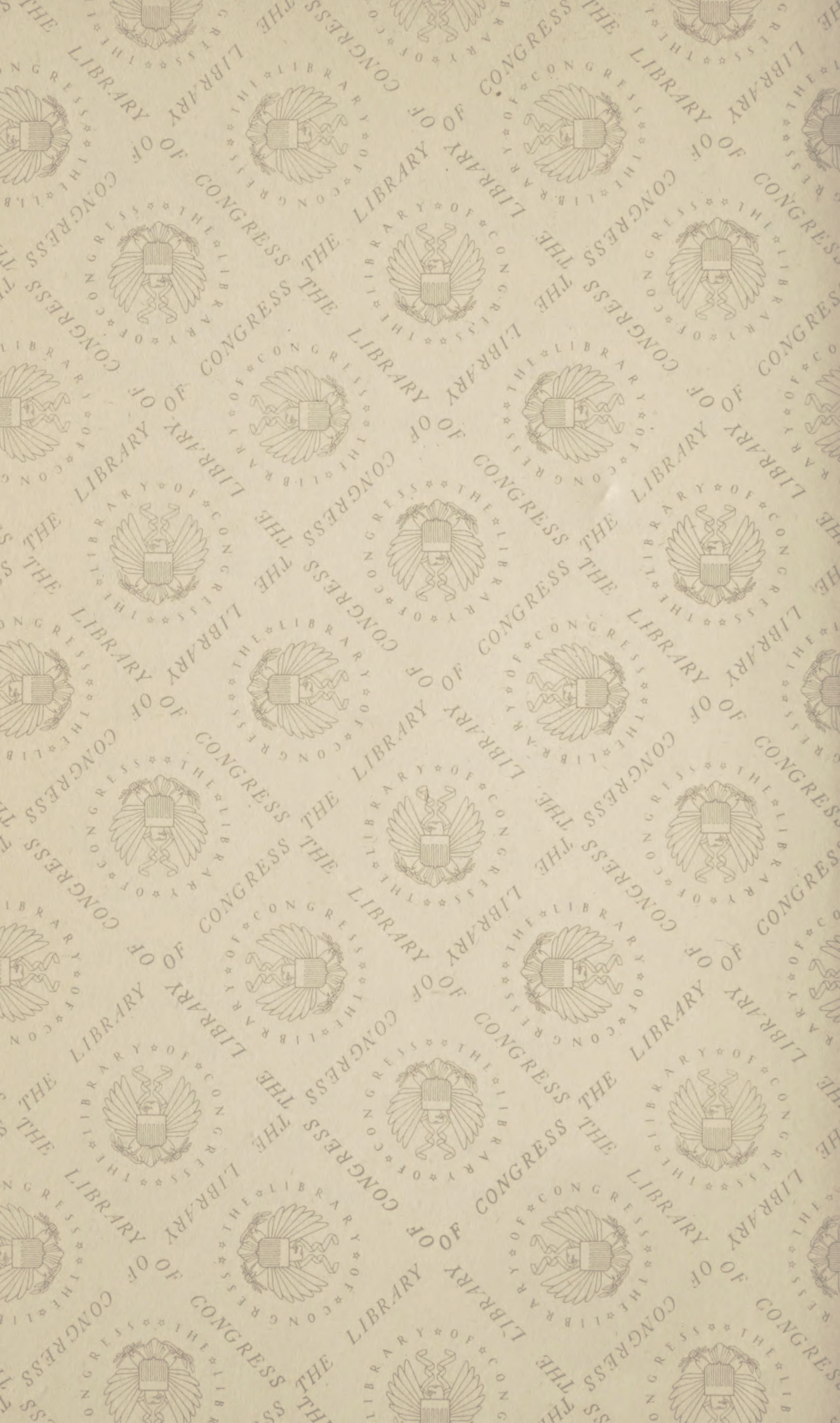
Marieken flushed. "Oh, those," she said, "don't mean anything. I just put them there to show how much I hated each one of the German officers. I was going to get even with them, and—" she laughed, "I guess I did."

"Go on," the Captain prompted.

"No, I don't want to. You tell me about your sister Alice," Marieken teased.

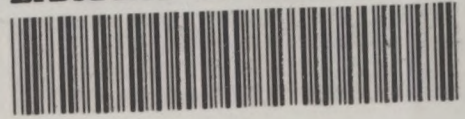
"Oh, that would take too long," the Captain protested. "Some day when I've lots of time I'll tell you about her," he promised, and for a few minutes longer they walked together over the green lawn.

THE END





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